

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 34 : Number Two : Summer 2013



Falling with Grace to Grace

**A Spirituality of Aging in Religious
Congregations**

Living Celibacy

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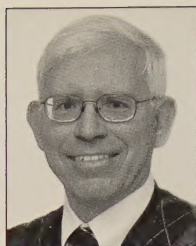
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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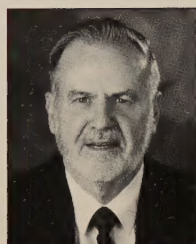
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35 The Challenge and Hope of Fostering the Moral Formation of Young People Today

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Editor's Page

Challenges and Changes for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Since our founding thirty-three years ago, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE has sought to provide our readers with timely and insightful articles on topics vital to their ministries. If we are to continue to do that in the future we will need your help.

Regis University has been a generous sponsor to us for ten years. Today, however, Regis, like many Catholic colleges and universities, is facing financial pressures and it is no longer possible for Regis to subsidize the magazine. The challenge that we at the magazine face, therefore, is to make the necessary changes to reduce our expenses and increase revenue. Beginning with this issue we are implementing these changes:

CHANGES FOR SUBSCRIBERS OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Renewing and new subscribers living outside the United States will receive the magazine in digital form only. We are no longer able to provide a printed copy of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT to overseas subscribers. The cost of mailing has become prohibitive. We will fulfill the remainder of a subscription in print form and send them through the mail, but when a subscription is renewed, the magazine will be delivered digitally. New subscribers will only be able to receive the magazine in digital form.

Online subscribers will receive an email when the magazine is available and will be directed to go to the website to download it. At present, the issue is available in PDF form. We hope to make it available in a more interactive form in the future.

NEW PRICE FOR DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Effective May 1, 2013 the new price for a one-year online subscription is \$39. The price of a print subscription remains at \$53. Print subscribers will continue to receive the magazine in digital form along with their printed edition of each issue.

SUPPLEMENTARY MAILINGS DISCONTINUED

It has been our practice in the past to mail the magazine to subscribers who renewed after the mail date. For example, if the issue mailed on September 1 and you renewed on September 2 we would still send you the Fall issue a week late. However, with the increased cost of mailing these copies individually we are no longer able to do that. If you renew after the mail date, your subscription will then continue with the following issue.

HELP US FIND NEW SUBSCRIBERS

We need to increase the number of subscribers to our magazine to remain viable. We operate without a marketing budget so we need your help to reach out to new subscribers. You can help us in these ways:

- Use the "Send an Article to a Friend" feature on our website (humandevelopmentmag.org). This is an easy way to alert colleagues and friends to the contents of the magazine and

to encourage them to subscribe. It is free and two articles are featured each issue.

- Promote HUMAN DEVELOPMENT in your religious community, with your pastoral staff and volunteer ministers, with your formation team and with your academic colleagues. Send them a link to our website or download and print our subscription form for distribution at meetings, community gatherings or when you offer a workshop.
- Distribute an article at community meetings, seminars, or parish gatherings. We are willing to grant free, one-time duplication of an article in exchange for promotion of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT by email to those who receive it.

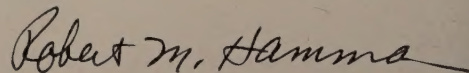
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We appeal to our subscribers who are able to make a donation above the cost of your subscription to help us continue our work. While we are seeking funding from a number of foundations, we appreciate anything more that you or your community can give us. You can donate when you renew or by sending a check payable to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT to our office at: P.O. Box 217, Old Saybrook, CT 06475.

We are most grateful to our loyal subscribers for your support. We hope to continue to serve you into the future!




Robert M. Hamma



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE TO COLLABORATE

Saint Luke Institute, a leading center for care and education of those in ministry, recently launched a new initiative called SLI Connect. See the article in this issue describing the various dimensions of that effort. We are pleased to cooperate in this effort by presenting "Living Celibacy: A Proposed Model for Celibacy Formation Programs" by Br. John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B., in this issue. This article presents the content of the first part of a four-part *Living Celibacy* Webinar series beginning September 24, 2013. Visit sliconnect.org to learn more and register for this and other Webinars. And look for more articles from the Saint Luke Institute experts in the future.



Richard Boileau

Falling ^{with} Grace to Grace

"The Light shines in the darkness"

In the course of finding God in all situations, which is the rich discovery of contemplative prayer, we are often surprised to find that God is revealed in sadness as well as joy; in darkness as well as light; in doubt as well as faith.

Falling is an image of darkness and doubt that Richard Rohr uses in his latest book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. As the dust jacket notes suggest, "Climbing, achieving, and performing will not serve us as we grow older . . . eventually we need to see ourselves in a different and more life-giving way. This message of 'falling down' is the most resisted and counter-intuitive of messages in the world's religions, including and most especially Christianity."

The contemplation of small and large losses that are ubiquitous in life is an opportunity to discover unexpected and special blessings, whether in the context of aging, illness or personal or professional disappointment. The blessings revealed in such situations are profoundly significant. They have the power to deeply transform us and accelerate spiritual development. These are the blessings of mature spirituality.

The key to understanding the message of Christianity in regard to graces that are to be found in "falling upward" is the theological mystery surrounding the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. In order to achieve unfathomable joy, Jesus had to endure unspeakable suffering. While his story may be more dramatic than ours, it is not irrelevant to ours. Some suffering in the human experience is not only inevitable, it is necessary. Carl Jung called this "legitimate suffering." The evangelist Matthew referred to it with paradoxical wit: "Anyone who wants to save his life must lose it. Anyone who loses his life will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Philip Simmons' promising literary career was just taking flight when he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. Adjusting to this harsh reality was very difficult, but he chose to claim each moment of life by writing about his experience and agreeing to allow scenes to be filmed for a full year at his home in New Hampshire with his wife and young children. His book is called *Learning to Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life*. The feature documentary, *The Man Who Learned to Fall*, debuted in Montreal in 1994. A few years ago, I had the privilege of hearing a presentation to a group of therapists by its producer, Gary Beitel.

Part of the process of accepting loss for Simmons was a conviction that there is a silver lining to every cloud. He described a boyhood leap from rocks high above a pool of water ten feet deep:

My eyes are focused downward on the water rushing toward my feet, and I am happy, terrified, alive . . . we are all falling—all of us—falling. We are all, now, in the moment, in the midst of that descent . . . If we are falling toward pain and weakness, let us also fall toward sweetness and strength. If we are falling toward death, let us also fall toward life (Simmons, 12).

The genius of his book is in the word "learning." It suggests two things. We can learn lessons from falling that help us to get up again, and we can learn how to fall as stuntmen and sportsmen to lessen the risk of serious injury from subsequent falls. We can avoid some falls but we cannot avoid them all. Pain, grief and loss are as much part of the

human landscape as joy and growth. We learn to adjust our life strategies. Sometimes we even have to adjust our goals. As Simmons wrote, "Let us pray that if we are falling from grace, dear God let us also fall with grace, to grace" (Simmons, 12).

AGING GRACEFULLY

Like debilitating illness, growing older can feel like defeat, like losing the battle to live abundantly. We cannot achieve as much, as fast or sometimes even as well. We seem less productive, at least by the standard that the modern world measures success. We feel obliged to impress others with contributions that are valued in economic terms but cannot. Paradoxically, falling can be the direction of failure or of deepening. There is a richness to be discovered in what lies below the surface.

Often obscured from view is the underlying meaning of our lives, the thread that ties together the phases of development from cradle to grave. The existence and truth of this integrating principle is layered over by selective memories about the past and virtual unconsciousness about the present moment. Consequently, awareness of our true self, of its ongoing potential and what constitutes our true joy, is denied.

During our "productive" years, we were often narcotised by busyness, obsessively driven to more and more busyness in an illusory pursuit of meaning, security and satisfaction. Aging and the limitations that come with it oblige us to focus on what is rather than on the idealization of what was or on the fear of what may lie ahead.

We are challenged to find meaning in who we are without these extras," comments Janet Malone in a reflection on aging in religious life. "No longer looking for self-worth, success and status, what we do, how we minister now comes from a truly realized sense of who we are, a self-worth that has been honed and shaped in the desert of letting go, letting come, letting be (Malone, 7).

Joan Chittister writes in *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*, "The task of every stage of life is to confront its fears so that it can become more than it

was . . . For the middle aged, it is dealing with the fear of failure. For those of us who have moved beyond the middle years, it is learning to cope with the fear of weakness" (Chittister, 19). She adds that we typically associate value with productivity that is measured in economic terms. In such a context, aging seems like devaluation. Rather, she proposes, we must redefine what it means to make a contribution to the world through, among other things, more authentic relationships, insightful mentoring and an expanded capacity for forgiveness and gratitude.

With grace, the fear that naturally comes with loss of youth becomes a transformation of the self in serenity and wisdom. Preoccupation with efficiency and achievement is replaced by a serene and loving witness to values that are often perilously overlooked by younger people and the joy that emerges from a deeper understanding of being as opposed to having or doing. Regret gives way to fulfillment.

Wisdom and integration of all the previous achievements—trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy and generativity—are the gift and ability, respectively, of the later years of life, as identified in Erikson's view of psychosocial development. According to Erikson, opposing basic trust is mistrust; autonomy, shame and doubt; initiative, guilt; industry, inferiority; identity, role confusion; intimacy, isolation; generativity, stagnation; ego integrity, despair. This presupposes that the pervasive questions that are proper to each stage have been adequately resolved. The unsavory alternative at this point is despair in the face of diminished capacities and a gnawing feeling that opportunities and even life as a whole have been wasted. The existential question in retirement, therefore, hinges on the intrinsic value of life, rather than the productive value (*Psychology Today*, 427f).

EMBRACING VULNERABILITY

What illness and aging have in common is vulnerability. The essence of a contemplative attitude seems to be vulnerability, writes Veronica Ward. As often is the case, her experience of personal failure was the fertile soil of spiritual development. But the contemplation

of failure is only fruitful if we accept beforehand that such a possibility exists. For many people, failure has no redeeming value and must be thrown behind without the slightest consideration.

She adds, "Suffering is not good in and of itself, but the contemplative person may put suffering to good use" (Ward, 200). Fullness and failure may appear to be opposites. Essentially they are opposites but inextricably tied. They are two sides of the same coin, coexisting in symbiotic relationship. It is in the confidence of knowing, as Saint Paul writes, "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10), that we can accept failure as merely a milestone on the journey of spiritual progress. But how can we arrive at a genuine understanding of this paradox without a contemplative attitude, one that does not prejudge the value of an encounter with what stands before us or a sudden awareness of what it evokes inside us?

Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston who studies the human capacity for empathy, belonging and love, became aware of the nature of this fragility and focused her work on authenticity and vulnerability. She concluded that frank awareness of our vulnerability is the key to authenticity and honesty in relationships. This principle applies equally to human interactions and to contemplative prayer.

Two years ago, she gave a talk in which she described as destructive the propensity to numb vulnerability. She presented as evidence indebtedness, obesity, addiction and the widespread use of pharmaceutical agents. Her breakthrough insight was to realize that emotions cannot be numbed selectively:

So when we numb (vulnerability, grief, shame, fear, and disappointment), we numb joy, we numb gratitude, and we numb happiness. And then we are miserable, and we are looking for purpose and meaning, and then we feel vulnerable, so then we have a couple of beers and a banana nut muffin. And it becomes this dangerous cycle (Brown, TedTalk).

Numbing extends beyond feelings, Brown says. It also applies to attitudes and values:

Religion has gone from a belief in faith and mystery to certainty.

The more afraid we are, the more vulnerable we are, and the more afraid we are. This is what politics looks like today. There's no discourse anymore. There's no conversation. There's just blame. You know how blame is described in the research? A way to discharge pain and discomfort.

The better path, argues Brown, is to operate from a conviction that "I am enough," and to stop fearing our inadequacies. This relaxes the heart and opens the mind to listening without fear. It liberates the power of compassion that naturally seeks to minister not only to others but also to our own wounded self. It makes us kinder and gentler to others and to ourselves, the effect of which is to allow our giftedness to surface and for joy to result from unrestrained deployment of these gifts.

THE LESSONS OF FAILURE

Contemplative prayer doesn't allow us to dwell in weakness or failure, or remain mired in negativity. Rather, it urges us to recognize that set-backs are real but that they do not define us unless we let them. All situations contain seeds of hope and joy. The contemplative mind sees and nurtures these seeds as the vital gifts of life that are unique to such situations. The contemplative attitude is one of abundance.

The contemplative eye is a healthy one, free from the infection of regret and anxiety, the blindness of ignorance, the myopia of fear and the cataracts of defeatism. It allows light and shadow to reach the soul without judgement and reveal truth unblemished. The contemplative heart embraces light with joy and shadow with the consolation of deeper understanding. The contemplative spirit is alert to truth and love, which are to be found in proportions equal to freedom from falseness. Contemplative prayer expects and finds grace in all situations.

As the prologue to John's Gospel reads, "A light shines in the darkness, a light that darkness cannot overcome" (John 1:5). Contemplative prayer seeks and finds that light, no matter how faint it appears to be at first. Then, as it draws nearer, the light grows larger and larger until it fills all the dark spaces outside

The contemplative eye is a healthy one, free from the infection of regret and anxiety, the blindness of ignorance, the myopia of fear and the cataracts of defeatism.

and inside. Sadly, most of us do not know this light; we do not trust that it exists or that it has the power to overcome the darkness.

Light is life. Shadows merely frame it. But like all frames, they can also serve to emphasize beauty, and to attract our gaze and awe. The light that darkness cannot overcome is blinding to those who seek *bling* instead. In time, the dazzle of human artifices diminishes and finally is extinguished by the despair of certain disappointment. Aging gracefully, accepting defeat graciously and bearing adversity generously are what provide the discernment that is needed to recognize the true light that grows and endures and satisfies our deepest yearning.

Contemplative prayer welcomes success spontaneously but soberly. It also examines failure with humility and care. The lessons of failure are practical and should never become pathological. Failure must never impair hope or injure confidence that is rooted in healthy self-understanding. Nor should it ever be permitted to undermine faith in God, in others or in our true and higher self. When others disappoint us, we must move forward with prudence and perseverance. When we disappoint ourselves, we must continue to advance with optimism.

But because setbacks on the journey of life often stop movement that comes from an unconscious drive or reckless will, setbacks should be regarded as privileged moments to deepen our awareness of internal and external dynamics as well as the inter-dependencies between ourselves and others, between ourselves and God and

between sometimes conflicted parts of our personality. In the complex operation of the human body, mind and spirit, things may have fallen out of alignment. It is never too late to deal with the conditions that led to failure—lovingly, judiciously and prayerfully.

It takes courage to confess and confront weakness without averting to denial or shrinking into shame or regret. It takes wisdom to stand in the gap between paralysis and growth. Sometimes, it takes the reassuring accompaniment of a friend, a spiritual director or a therapist to take that stand and help us hold that ground; then we can move forward freely.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, How surely gravity's law, strong as an ocean current, takes hold of even the smallest thing and pulls it toward the heart of the world...This is what the things can teach us: to fall, patiently to trust our heaviness (*Rilke*, 16).

THE CONTEMPLATION OF DOUBT

As with other sources of distress and anxiety, doubt also seems to trigger a response of avoidance or denial. Oftentimes, we rationalize our way through contradictory evidence rather than face the possibility that our assumptions may be wrong. Exceptionally, we confess doubt, especially when the issue is inconsequential. But when doubt threatens a foundational belief, most of us tend to either minimize it or, if it is significant,

become discouraged and de-motivated. Confusion or conflict in values and even fear displace the energy required to continue.

Thomas Merton wrote, Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial "doubt." This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious 'faith' of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion (*Merton*, 12).

From this, we may conclude that doubt is a gift. It is a privileged pause in an otherwise mindless consumption of facts that are interpreted to confirm our tenaciously held presumptions. Doubt reminds us that we are not all-knowing and that there are limitations in our awareness, understanding, judgment and decisions about how to treat our daily experiences. Moreover, it invites us to look back and carefully consider how we got to this point before proceeding in a particular direction.

Ironically, doubt pushes into a kind of darkness where the true light resides,



beyond the glare of invented brilliance which is often more akin to the gaudily webbed colored light with which we adorn houses at Christmastime than the distant star in the silent night that guided wise men to an epiphany that would change their lives and ours. Merton adds, "The more perfect faith is, the darker it becomes" (Merton, 134).

When faced with darkness, our human instinct is to escape it and, if we cannot, to close our eyes and numb our feelings. The wisdom of true light reminds us that faith is diluted, not strengthened by what Merton calls "the half-light of created images and concepts." It's amazing how blinded we become by half-truths and our own fixed ideas about life's meaning and purpose. Yet, divine insight is possible for those who enter the darkness with faith, which is to say with trust in truth that can only be verified by abandoning defenses and pre-conceptions.

Faith enters the darkness confidently and accepts doubt as the stones with which to pave a new path, one that leads to the true spiritual life that is neither an orgy of pleasurable emotions nor a school of intellectually satisfying clarity but a relentless energy of wisdom and love. Wisdom, more specifically the wisdom of love, then provides a kind of night vision that satisfies the heart with consolation, as Ignatius understood that term (Fleming, 202ff), or "perfect joy," as Francis of Assisi understood it (Celano, 165). It satisfies the mind with an intuitive knowing that exceeds the limitations of the senses and bounded rationality.

ONGOING TRANSFORMATION

Setbacks in life break down feebly constructed certitudes. In my ministry, I meet a lot of people who are dealing with grief. I tell them that no significant loss will leave them unchanged. Loss that is faced truthfully results in a reconstruction of at least parts of the self, especially on spiritual, emotional and intellectual levels, sometimes even physical. It is as though the person is no longer capable of carrying the experience that shook the very foundations of his or her being. A new container is needed, one that is larger and more resilient; better adapted to the new data. This transformation can never be forced,

but it must be allowed for transcendence of the loss to occur (Boileau, 38-43).

Initially at least, change may be resisted because of fear. Even when better alternatives are presented to the psyche, it tends to cling in desperation to what is familiar rather than let go of yet one more thing. Transformation is God's work. Our job is to accept that circumstances have changed and to apply discernment in the new choices that we now face. Our job is to accept God's providential love as the breath of life that is far more efficacious than any force that we can muster on our own. We tend to look back nostalgically, not seeking wisdom but wishing for the restoration of the life that existed before. God looks forward, hoping that we will learn something about life from our experiences and be open to new horizons, and always higher levels of consciousness and well-being.

Indeed, God's Holy Spirit leads the willing to a new level of understanding in which there are, in fresh supply, awe with which to receive wonder, trust with which to face mystery and patience with which to deal with limitations. Love is transformed from a noun to a verb. "Falling" in love becomes a decision to love for better or worse, in sickness and in health. Love becomes a choice to allow the conversion that progressively eradicates unworthy notions from the mind, one illusion at a time; shifts the focus of the heart's preoccupation from what feels good to what is objectively good. And it sets unity as its highest goal—integrity of the self, solidarity with others and communion with the ultimate Other.

RECOMMENDED READING

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"Contemporary men and women have few role models for aging. We need voices/models that speak to the soul."
Jane Pretat

Do you have a belt around your waist? Are you being led where you prefer not to go? While we are familiar with the scripture passage from John 21:15-19, I suggest it might be a metaphor for aging, specifically aging in religious life. Intellectually, we know that aging is normal; we see it all around us and the cycle of the seasons shows us this natural rhythm. So why do so many of us chafe at the belt of aging? Why do so many of us deny our personal life pilgrimage to death and Mystery and even more so, this life cycle in our congregations? There are so many terms for the journey that each of us is on, our pilgrimage from life to death. We have heard that there are two experiences we have alone: the arrival into this life and the departure from this life. For both, it is a sense of learning to say both hello and goodbye. Indeed, we have heard often in our congregations, as we moved around for our ministries, that unless we know how to say and ritualize our goodbyes, we never really learn to say hello. Why? Because unless we can live into the loss of the known and the secure, we have not released that space in our hearts where we can put out into the deep of the unknown and the untried, in both relationships and our way of life.





Spirituality

Aging in Religious Congregations

Malone, C.N.D.

It is very difficult to embrace any aspect of our personal and congregational lives that we have been taught to deny or ignore. We as religious have not been prophetic about this particular aspect of our life-death journey because everything we see, read and hear is about eternal youth. Look at the billion dollar cosmetic and health-care industries that hoodwink us into believing we are still young with dyes, nips, tucks, extreme diets and exercise. From a holistic perspective, we know that it is important to take care of our physical, psychological and spiritual health and that a balance in diet and exercise is critical. Aging is not about going to seed or going to pot. We know that life expectancy has increased so a spirituality of aging is all about aging in healthy and holistic ways. Yet, we are reminded that talking about aging is sort of frowned upon. "We can't really let go in public or celebrate an aging process we've learned to abhor. Yet we know instinctually that change is in our bodies, in our daily activities, and in our dreams" (Pretat, 1994, 17).

In this article I will look at different aspects of a spirituality of aging in both ourselves and in our congregations. To do this, we will admit to the hellos and goodbyes, the births and the deaths, the holding on, the letting go. There is a challenge before us because everything in our culture and in the culture of religious life denies, for the most part, the reality of aging, diminishment and dying. To begin, what do we do with the numbers?

AGING

A Question of Numbers, Stages, Theories

In 1982, the United Nations organized the First World Assembly on Aging in Vienna. At that time, the elderly made up 8% of the world population with a projection of 10% in 2000. In 1999, we celebrated the International Year of the Elderly with a focus on their human capital contribution to the economy and social life, mainly through volunteering. Then, in 2002, the Second World Assembly on Aging was held in Madrid. At that gathering it was noted, "In the 20th century, old age was but a footnote.

In the 21st century, it is to become the main theme" (Stockman, 2007, 124).

How often do we hear that aging is a normal process moving from birth to death? Because ageism with its dismissal of older people and the concomitant push to hide our age is so prevalent in our society, we are afraid of aging. This is the main issue. Remember, the first gray hair, the first wrinkle, the staying at 39 forever? Today, aging has many appellations including the second half of life (after 50 years), the Golden Age and the Third Age. The First Age is the young years, the Second Age is work years, The Third Age is the boundary between 45-75 years and the Fourth Age is frailty and dependency.

Old age also has been divided into three stages: young-old (65-74 years), old-old (75-84 years) and oldest-old (after 85). In addition, some have postulated theories of aging. For example, in the Developmental Theory of aging, we begin at birth, then progress through childhood, school years, teenage years, work/professional years, adult years of vocation/life choice (single, married, religious, ordained), retirement/elder years and from there to death. In this theory, we negotiate the developmental tasks of each period in our lives. The Activity Theory, as it connotes, is our staying active with all our familiar ways of living as long as is possible. The Wear and Tear Theory postulates that our bodies wear out with stress and living. The Disengagement Theory focuses a slowing down and a disengagement from most of our former outer life in order to "gain more time for introspection . . . thus giving (ourselves) permission to proceed with inner tasks" (Pretat 1994, 63).

Elders Increasing

In a culture focused on being young and looking young, there are no real guidelines for how to age with wisdom and grace. It would seem that there are variations on the denial theme in religious life. Kubler-Ross' stages of dying come to mind: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Not linear, these stages are present in their various manifestations in too many of our

congregations because of our fear that our congregations will die. This denial is antithetical to the reality that all religious groups follow the life cycle pattern as outlined by Cada et. al. (1985) of birth/beginnings, expansion, stabilization/institutionalization, breakdown/diminishment and the final stage of refounding, restoration or minimal survival/dying. Why then are we concerned about aging in religious congregations if we truly believe that consecrated life will always exist and that it will change as we read the signs of the times?

Our culture extols youth and looking young and vibrant. Many of us shy away from stating that we are aging or that our congregations are diminishing, even dying. Years ago in our congregations, we seemed to have a better sense of aging when we were multi-generational groupings. Some of us were called "the young nuns" and others the "old nuns." There are few vocations and the ones who do join us are older and have had other lifestyles. Today, the average age in many congregations, both apostolic and monastic, is 75+ years, moving quickly to 80 years. Life expectancy has increased and many people are living much longer, some into their late 90s and indeed, their 100s. It has been reported that centenarians are expected to increase in the next decade, with more women in this age group than men. In part, we read, "New census data shows . . . a higher proportion of seniors than ever before—a development that has crept up on society with far-reaching implications for health, finance, policy and everyday family relationships" (*The Guardian*, May 15, 2012, A7).

Which Season?

Sometimes, when we are at a point of not knowing where we are going, the use of metaphor and analogy can help us in such in-between times. It seems this is the case for many of us and our congregations regarding a spirituality of aging. One such metaphor is The Medicine Wheel of our native peoples. Based on the directions and the seasons, it can help us come to grips with where we are both personally and communally in our life journey. We begin in the east, the

birth and springtime of life where the world is our oyster. Everything is new and full of possibility; we explore our own potential physically, psychologically and spiritually in these years. In the south, the summer of life, we are at the height of our adult years, in the bloom of our lives. Then we move to the west and the harvest time of fall, a time in which we reap what we have sown. We are past our prime now and are moving in all ways from a *chronos*-directed time to more of a *kairos*-time of retirement, with more time for contemplation and attending to our inner soul work. Then we move on to the winter and dying time of our lives in the north. We are readying for the last part of our journey home. To adapt T.S. Eliot's words, we have moved from the *attachment* of the spring and summer of our lives to the *detachment* of the fall season and then to a sense of *holy indifference* in the winter of our lives, that final letting go in the trusting words of Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

Erikson's Stages of Maturation

Another way to look at our aging is to revisit Erikson's stages of growth and maturation. In their classic work, *Christian Life Patterns* (1979), wife and husband Evelyn and James Whitehead detail Erikson's last three stages of maturation: intimacy, generativity and integrity within a Christian perspective of aging. They invite us to explore our aging not just within the proverbial *chronos* time of regularity and control but the transformative *kairos* time of Mystery in which we are invited into the unknown: letting go, letting come, letting be. They note, "It is not easy to be old. It is an affront to one's self-image, a deterrent to one's plans, and a general inconvenience to society" (179).

To look at the stages of intimacy, generativity and integrity within a spirituality of aging in religious congregations is to breathe new life into them. Now, in this second half of life, we view intimacy personally and communally as a mutuality of cooperation, community and group solidarity. With a more supple sense of who we are, we are

more empathic with others and are more willing to be influenced by them in concrete ways in our lives. In these twilight years, we are mellowed, ripened in the seasons of life.

Generativity in these years is all about fostering new life in ways we were too busy to even conceive years back. With our drive for success (perhaps a savior complex?) more balanced, we are able to foster in our community more of the servant leadership that Jesus modeled in the washing of his disciples' feet.

Integrity at this age and stage is all about examining how each individual life has unfolded and how each congregation has come to this moment. It is about how we forgive and allow opportunities for reconciliation when it is possible.

Purpose of Aging

There is a purpose to aging for all groups in society. It is that time of making better sense of our lives now that we are out of the fray. We resonate with the saying, "We live life forwards but understand it backwards." It is that time in our lives when we have the leisure to reflect on the good and the enough in our lives. In consecrated life, what are the goals for these years, both personally and congregationally?

Throughout these reflections, the invitation is to ponder the purpose of aging and what a spirituality of aging would look like for me and for my congregation. Undoubtedly, each of us in the second half of life has noted changes in ourselves, physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually. Perhaps, we can reiterate the line of the song, "The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be, many long years ago."

Physically, we may have aches and pains, be less agile and have chronic diseases. Mentally, we notice our forgetting, particularly names (anomia begins in the early 40s). Others of us may have the beginnings of dementia, the most common form being Alzheimer's. Psychologically/socially, we live into the loss of certain relationships, particularly through retirement and death. Spiritually, we may experience a certain ennui, a

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certain acedia because this is the season we are called to be more than to do, to be more contemplative. However, if in our active ministries, we “got our prayers in” and never really learned about the desert of contemplation and mysticism, we may experience a sense of “Is this all there is?” One of the main telltale signs in congregations is our selective memory of the good old days when we thought we were in control. In fact, it has been suggested that “religious tend to live in the past and not the present” (Stockman 2007, 11).

Each of us knows deep down that there will always be some form of consecrated life because of its ideal of giving all for God. Today, more than ever before, if we are going to be countercultural, we must be prophetic. We need to move beyond the stages of dying (denial, bargaining, anger, depression) and accept the reality of death. This acceptance will free up our energy to work proactively toward developing a spirituality of aging in our congregations. What would such a spirituality of aging look like?

A SPIRITUALITY OF AGING

First, spirituality (from the Latin *spirare*) is about the breath, the spirit, the deepest meaning of our lives. We are called to look at spirituality as something as integral to us as our breath. Spirituality is a life gift, one that can be explored, nurtured and deepened our entire lives. In contrast to religion, which is about the externals, the rites, the dogmas of our lives, spirituality is about that inner journey of finding ultimate meaning in an integration of the fragmented strands of our lives. Spirituality is about going deeper, going inward, letting go, letting come, letting be, the great Mystery of God. “Spirituality concerns an ancient primal search for meaning and (is) an inherent energy” (Malone, 2007, 40). The fruits of spirituality are numerous, including love, patience, joy, kindness, self-control and faithfulness. These fruits develop and mature over a lifetime of moving inward. Having set our parameters for aging and spirituality, let’s look at some qualities of a spirituality of aging.

QUALITIES OF A SPIRITUALITY OF AGING

“We aren’t seekers at all; we are the sought.” Barbara Fiand

Doing and Being

Our vocation as religious is making a lifelong commitment to God. At the time of our profession, we committed ourselves to God, first and foremost. That is our mission, a mission that never changes, no matter our age and stage. The charism in which we live this mission is the particular gift that each congregation offers to the people of God, be it within an apostolic, monastic or missionary ministry. In our aging years, when we are no longer involved in ministry 24/7, we are called to the ministry of being in which we learn anew what it means to be.

Because often we are taught that we are what we do, some major identity questions arise as we become old. Who am I when I pass from doing to being? Who am I when I am nothing other than who I am? Who am I when I am no longer what I used to do? In the beginning of this transformation, we move into the desert experience akin to Jesus’ temptations where he dealt with the *kenosis*, the emptying out of the false self of power, possessions and prestige.

What makes this *kenosis* very difficult is the lack of understanding in many of our congregations that this time of aging in our lives is a blessed time; it is not a time for feeling guilty because we are not working all the time. In effect, this *kenosis* is about finding a much better balance in our doing and being with allowance for more silence, stillness and solitude. This is a real challenge for most of us, so we ask our leaders for a “ministry.” This so-called ministry keeps us out there and delays the inevitable facing of our demons in here.

One main goal at this time is learning to live with oneself and with a mundane daily routine without frittering it away on escapes. Escapes dull our pain and boredom, and many times can lead to misusing travel, shopping, television, gambling, novels, smoking and drinking as ways to escape the present. However,

we read, “A person with an inner sense of their own identity and goal in life has a high tolerance of daily routine . . . an inner strength to face the desert” (Cummings, 1978, 40).

There is a Zen saying that the *zazen* (zen master) sits for the universe. One of the biggest contributions we religious can make to a spirituality of aging is our ability just to be—to be quiet, to be still—and in this being to be gradually stripped of our need for possessiveness, control and power. This is in no way a quietism but rather a rich sense of the journey inward where God awaits us. But first, we have to quiet all our fretting about wasting our time and not being useful. Learning how to sit in silence, solitude and stillness takes time for many of us who quickly “said” our prayers (got them “in”). Now, we are called contemplatively to “be” our prayer, and this is not easy.

Not much has been written about the ministry of being. As noted above, this is not an either/or. Rather it is more of a both/and, but now with a shift in emphasis. Now, we focus our prayer and contemplation time as a time of receptivity rather than activity. Barbara Fiand has written about this much-needed exploration in her book, *In the Stillness You Will Know*. The ministry of being is a depth call that moves us to both personal and cosmic transformation and wholeness. “We can change humanity, society and the world simply by our sitting and changing ourselves” (2002, 82).

Letting Go, Letting Come, Letting Be

Jean Paul Sartre reportedly said that our early years are “*pour soi*” (for self) a time of focus on externals, accumulating, rising, climbing. Our aging years are “*en soi*” (in, within self), a time of divesting, letting go, letting come in a rhythm of inner work.

In exploring a spirituality of aging, we are challenged to let go. We recognize our crossover time from accumulating to divesting. Once we cross over, we start our *en soi* time, a time in which we realistically come to grips with where we have been and where we are going. It is a time of letting go the past both personally and communally. It is a strip-



ping down to the essentials of who we are before God in the wholeness of creation. We are reminded, "Letting go of our past is one of the most difficult challenges in life" (Kalellis, 2005, 139).

What we are called to let come are our fears and regrets in order to look at them from deep within. A great deal of forgiveness of self, others and God can happen at this very special time. Why? We are taking off our masks when we move inward; we don't have to impress anyone and our God is all-loving and all-knowing. In this time of naming our fears (the worst fear is fear itself), we are inviting ourselves to enter into the forgiveness and mercy necessary for releasing our resentments and desire for revenge. Forgiveness is about the choice of staying bitter or getting better because forgiveness is all about self-healing and not making bile about something that happened in our past. Reconciliation might happen and it might not because it requires the goodwill and mutuality of the other. When we forgive, we self-heal. Once we have let come the hurt and the embarrassment, we can let it go in order to move on.

Letting be is all about the freedom that comes from the inside out when we have let go, as much as is possible, of our fears and regrets, recognizing in gratitude all we have been given. This is the being time of ensuring we are disci-

plined to take the time, love and energy to nourish our inner being, our heart sense. This journey of letting go, letting come and letting be is not magic. Yes, we are committed to being in this season of our lives. However, "things may not have changed much on the surface of our lives but things change considerably in the depths of our lives . . . in our new beginnings . . . our aging years." (Dorff, 1988, 101).

Drive and Meaning

Another aspect of a spirituality of aging is meaning. We have heard it said that we can live any "now" if we have meaning in our lives. In our younger years in religious life, we were very caught up in our ministries. The meaning we sought was primarily prestige and success, not just personally but in the name of our congregations. True, we were all about the peace, justice and compassion of the new reign of God, but we also were driven for the position and success involved in our ministries. Our younger years, whether in apostolic or monastic life, were in some ways, our heyday years. We never seemed to have enough time; we were always busy and our prayer life was "squeezed in" amidst all our busyness. We had a good sense of who we were because in those days, we were what we did.

Now is the season in that fall and

winter of our lives when we are challenged to come home to self, to our true self. And what a challenge that can be! Because we may have suppressed what we really believed and thought, the only self in these golden years may be our false self of ego and hubris. A good check-in for ourselves is how often we catch ourselves telling any person willing to listen about all the good things we did in the past. A sure sign that we don't know our true self is this constant living in the past of our selective memories.

As elders, we now are challenged to find meaning in who we are without all these extras. No, it is not a matter of folding up one's tent, pulling out the last pegs of our former selves and waiting to die. Nor is it a matter of not having some small ministry. No longer looking for self-worth, success and status, what we do, how we minister now comes from a truly realized sense of who we are, a self-worth that has been honed and shaped in the desert of letting go, letting come, letting be. Now should be the season of "I choose to" rather than "I have to."

The leaders/administrators among us have to ask whether we are any kind of model in a spirituality of aging when we ask aging religious carry full-time jobs, or when as members of congregations we are not content to live into a ministry of being. If we are keeping aging members in such full-time positions we should ask if it is time to

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transfer these positions to qualified lay staff. And if we are not able to pay such staff, then perhaps we have to look at letting go of such positions. It is all about nurturing a new meaning in our lives about who we are and where we're going. Can we live into the secure meaning of "I am only what people see when they look at me now. . . . I am only what I have prepared myself to be beyond what I did" (Chittister, 2008, 11)?

Regrets and Forgiveness

Each of us is too-well aware that we have regrets in our lives, and perhaps we don't want to have to deal with their underlying issues. If we keep ourselves busy, then we don't have to really sit down and be. We don't have to think. In a spirituality of aging, as noted above, these years are all about integration and indeed, transformation. The task before us is allowing these regrets to surface so that we can look at them with the experience and wisdom of our years. It is said that regret has two faces: regret about life choices and regret about life failures.

In a spirituality of aging in religious life, we need to look at our life choice, of a call-response to religious life. Do we have regrets about this life choice, the mystery of the call-response in which we were asked to make God our first and principal life choice? Do we find ourselves musing about why we came and more importantly, why we stay in religious life? It is not so uncommon for our lay brothers and sisters to regret their life choices or life partners but like us, they hang in, they stay. Why? For many of them, it's economics, fear or for stability for the children. But if I have regrets about why I stayed in religious life, am I ready to look at that truthfully now? Am I ready to focus on letting go, letting come, letting be in these last years?

The second face of regret is about life failures. No one is immune to the ups and downs of life and who among us has not said if we knew then what we know now, we could have avoided certain mistakes and failures? However, that is what the experience of life teaches us: to learn from our mistakes and move on. This is the crux of both wisdom and deep inner peace: dealing with our failures, letting them go and moving

on. Otherwise, we can turn ourselves into worrying and scrupulous people. One has to wonder whether it is true what some of us may have noted, that people in consecrated life appear to have more regrets and fears about their life failures and how they will be judged before God. A spirituality of aging invites us to transform our regrets through forgiveness and move on.

Fear and Gratitude

A grateful heart is an open heart, a loving heart, a forgiving heart. "Gratitude keeps alive what has meaning for us and fosters our capacity to apologize and forgive" (Arrien, 2007, 78). An important transition in our aging is to transform our fears of loss into new beginnings, into a metanoic stance of gratitude. It is freeing when we can accept who we are now without all our masks. Learning to be grateful is grace, gift and process. We may have felt we were not enough and did not do enough throughout our lives. This led to fears and regrets multiplying. It is a natural next step to feel ungrateful and dissatisfied with life.

Now is the time to move from such dissatisfaction to a life stance of gratitude in which grace and gift are the cornerstones. We can begin by learning anew how to feel and express our thanks, our appreciation for even the smallest aspects of our lives. Gratitude involves satisfaction with life, with oneself, with one's congregation and with the world. I am enough. I am good enough. I have enough. "Ingratitude lies at the root of our difficulty in loving God beyond guilt and in loving others freely" (Leddy, 2002, 61).

Because many of us live the adage of "returning the favor," we find it difficult to give without counting the cost. Each of us has met grateful people who exude the "enoughness" of the here and now, people who give generously with no implied sense of having the favor returned. I only have to think of my own mother as a model of this generosity and gratefulness. When we learn to be grateful and gracious, we come to a new understanding of the divine nature of God's unconditional love for us.

St. Augustine reminds us that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. To be lonely is to be alone but not contented with this state. There is a sense of restlessness, isolation, and even rejection or abandonment. To be lonely means I don't have a place of so-called security, a place where I can be myself, a place where I am accepted for who I am in my essence without all the masks.

Every person is lonely to a greater or lesser degree. Loneliness is not all bad. In fact, loneliness tells me something about me, tells me that I am my best self in relationship. Loneliness reminds me that no one is an island; we need others in our lives. Ultimately, as a person of faith, loneliness reminds me of my burning desire to be united with God. Loneliness is about our desire for depth, for union. Dag Hammarskjöld once wrote, "Pray that your loneliness may spur you towards finding something (Someone) to live for, great enough to die for."

It seems in this desert stripping of loneliness to solitude that we realize its necessity in a spirituality of aging. Loving others without the security of attachment, without possessiveness, necessitates our coming home to the searing loneliness that is part of consecrated life. No, our life doesn't have a "patent" on loneliness, but our life is the vocation in which we vow that God will be our sole attachment."

We know that our lifestyle is ripe for both intense loneliness and ancillary selfishness. We compensate for our loneliness in many different ways, the most obvious of which is how we become overly attached to our family of origin. This can look differently for each of us, depending on such factors as physical proximity, age and stage of life. The bottom line is that no one likes to experience loneliness and our models of community living (common life or apartment living) have not addressed this issue directly. The sad result is a great deal of "vocational" loneliness in our lives. One way that it is handled is to live near our families and to spend important occasions with them. We might ask ourselves whether it has

become a norm that such occasions in our congregations are scheduled around family commitments?

In a spirituality of aging, we are challenged to embrace our loneliness in ways in which we can withstand the silence and stillness so that over time we can transform it into solitude. It becomes a matter of being comfortable with our own company rather than covering it over in our different escapes, including the newest addictions of technology: the Internet, Facebook, tweeting, texting, talking on cell phones, Skypeing. As we age, we recognize our restlessness and that the psychological and emotional aspects of aging are in some ways more difficult than its physical aspects. Part of being a pilgrim on our journey home is embracing our solitude as time for more in-depth contemplation, reflection and *lectio divina*. There are no short cuts to solitude; we have to go through the process of letting go of our attachments to people and things. A commitment to solitude requires a great deal of patience and starting anew each day. We know we are coming home to solitude when "we feel less compulsive and driven, less restless and frenzied, less greedy and possessive . . . Perhaps we feel really free" (Rolheiser, 2004, 168).

Leisure and Contemplation

Is it your sense that we are afraid of free time, of leisure, in religious life? Was our badge of pride that religious never retire; they die out rather than rust out? Perhaps we are well aware of religious in their mid-80s who are still working full time and are proud to let others know about it. Perhaps we are also aware that others, retired with a pension, may feel entitled to put their feet up. Does either example reveal aging as a gift to achieve more balance between doing and being, outer work and inner work? Aging is not an end-of-life sentence but rather a golden opportunity to come home to our true selves, dispensing with the hubris and ego.

Such *kenosis* and *metanoia* require time, leisure time. When we speak of leisure, we may associate it with laziness,

dissipation or wasting our precious time (remember, "time is money").

We may have learned to mistrust anything that we haven't worked for. In fact, this is the season of our lives for nurturing our contemplative, mystical yearnings. Was it Jung who referred to this time in our lives as our contemplative season? Learning to be requires time and leisure; being contemplative requires these things too. According to Scott Peck, if we wish to be more contemplative, we need much more solitude; we need to learn how to withdraw from life's busyness (1995, 90).

What is leisure? Perhaps it is not what we think. We may think of leisure as rest, a restorative for our fatigue from work or even a well-earned compensation or vacation. Leisure does not exist as an antidote to work. Rather, leisure in its truest sense is about becoming whole as a human being, becoming integrated.

Leisure is a mental and spiritual attitude, . . . a condition of the soul . . . , an attitude of non-activity, inward calm, silence. Leisure means not being busy but letting things happen. Leisure is a form of silence, the soul's capacity to steep oneself in the whole of creation. . . . Leisure is a contemplative attitude not active intervening but openness to everything . . . Leisure is letting oneself go. . . . Leisure is only possible when a person is at one with self (Pieper, 1963, 40, 41).

In other words, if we want to be true mystics, full of awe and wonder in living the gracious gift of this "now," we have to take time and cultivate leisure. Being a contemplative or mystic requires our moving from the *chronos*-time to a more open-ended *kairos*-time of mystery and letting go. Contemplative life is closely linked to the notion of leisure. "To achieve leisure is one of the fundamental powers of the human soul" (Pieper, 1963, 449).

In this contemplative leisure, we give ourselves permission to let go of our book prayers (getting them in), to move away from discursive, kataphatic prayer to the more trans-conceptual, apophatic prayer of being, being in the silence,

being in Mystery. We don't watch the clock; we turn our vision inward to the faith-blindness of God within. In so doing, we cultivate that mystical eye of wonder and awe of God in all beings, in all creation.

The question then becomes how can we not take more time for leisure? There is a justice aspect to leisure as we have been exploring it. Leisure goes hand in hand with contemplation, mysticism and transcendence. Leisure must be embraced because it stands for that poetic wonder beyond the utilitarian of our lives. And what better way to start than ensuring we honor a day of sabbath rest each week, a time when we pray and play, rest and remember. We commit ourselves, in the spirit of the Jewish *Shabbat*, to this special *kairos* time in which all unnecessary work is put aside. I ask myself on each sabbath whether what I am doing on this day of rest could be done on any other day or could wait. Often, we treat our sabbath like a regular work day because we can't stand the quiet and stillness. "Remember, keep holy the sabbath day."

Mystery and Wisdom

In the end, a spirituality of aging is all about the wisdom to "know the difference" between two things, as noted in the serenity prayer. Over many years, each of us has accumulated lots of information (facts and trivia) and knowledge, but have we acquired wisdom? Wisdom is a gift, a grace; we

can't acquire it as such but if we are blessed, it somehow roots in us. We recognize its gift through the heart landscapes of others who quietly say to us on one or another occasion, "You are so wise." This wisdom time is not about holding on to the past but taking from our information and knowledge some kinds of prophetic wisdom and as elders passing on the gift of wisdom to future generations.

Wisdom is tied into mystery and the mystical aspect of our lives, when we have become free of the confines of social rigors, personal needs and public roles. It is that graced time when we come home to the mystery that old age frees us from ourselves so that we are open to life evolving rather than trying to control it. "In our life we have learned to deny the right of the unexpected, the mysterious . . . (Chittister, 2008, 76). In our spirituality of aging, when we create that sacred space of leisure, that "now" of openness, we somehow experience the thin place of mystery, the mystical aspect of life in the warm breath of Mystery. And somehow, in a flash we know the difference that wisdom provides. "Our goal now is to be what we have discovered about life" (Chittister, 2008, 125).

CROSSING OVER AND DEATH

Personal Death

For so many years, our own personal death was an intellectual assent. Now, as we continue to age, we

realize that we have lived many more years than we have remaining, even with the stats for increased life expectancy. Even with our faith in the belief of death as a transformation to new life, we still don't know what death will be like. We hear things about going down a long tunnel toward the light, toward God, but in our gut, we still don't know. Despite the marriage of science and religion and even Pope John Paul II's statement back in the late 1990s that within the parameters of the new story of creation, heaven and hell are not physical places but states of being, still we don't know. We don't know because no one (other than Jesus) has come back to reassure us. No doubt many of you have read Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Do you remember the line that Morrie stated on one of Mitch's visits? Moving steadily toward death, Morrie told Mitch, "The truth is . . . once you learn how to die, you learn how to live" (1997, 82).

How important it is for us in consecrated life to be a model of waiting in hope for what is to come when we die. After our years of a life dedicated to God alone, are we able to accentuate, in a spirituality of aging, the normalness of death in the life cycle? Of course, to be peaceful about our own death doesn't start on our deathbed. It is a grace and a daily letting go, letting come, letting be.

I remember in the days of formal retreats of the month in my congregation and in our annual retreats, we were encouraged to "pray for a happy death." Over the years, I have reframed that



admonition to praying for an acceptance of my own death, a death that can be peaceful from the inside out as my body, mind and spirit prepare to take leave of this way of being for the transformation in eternal life. In accepting my own life as I have been gifted, its culmination is acceptance of my own death. To help prepare, I have taken time for leisure and contemplation, to determine and put into writing how I want to be celebrated in death. Have you put into writing your wishes for a mourning ritual, departure liturgy, favorite songs, chants, prayers, poems from which your congregation, family and friends can choose? This is all part of a spirituality of aging. Making these wishes known for when that time comes is our affirmation that yes, I was born, and yes, I will die. "The recognition of death, my own death, can liberate my concern for life. . . . The final acceptance of my own life is the acceptance of my death as its finite boundary" (Whiteheads, 1979, 193).

Congregational Death

Likewise, a spirituality of aging demands us to look at the life-death cycle in our religious congregations. As many realize, speaking about our congregation's dying is basically anathema. We know the life cycle of any group, we recognize its stages as noted earlier, but some of us conclude, perhaps in our denial and fear, that life seasons and cycles are for other religious groups, not ours.

Tied into this very prickly question of congregational dying is the topic of vocations. Yes, we know that consecrated life is a gift, a call-response that is wedded to the signs of the times. Yes, we know that such a life will always exist but can we accept that such a call may not be within the present models of religious life most of us are now living? We know the statistics about our diminishment in numbers, the increase of our average age to 75+ years, yet we hold on to putting personnel and financial resources into attracting women and men to our ranks, to this model we are living. We know the numbers and retention rate of those who may come. Do we have the wisdom to know the difference between holding on with gritted teeth and letting go in faith, hope and trust? Is this our last hold

on control in our declining years? Some congregations have had the wisdom to let go, let be, let the Spirit come, awaiting in hope for new models of consecrated life, reflecting the signs of these times.

We seem to think that accepting the reality of the life-death cycle of our congregations is the final straw, the ultimate admission of defeat. We think that such acceptance means admission that somehow we have not been faithful, that somehow we have failed, that all we have been and done was for naught. In a spirituality of aging, this could be our greatest challenge: letting go, letting come, letting be. No one of us wants to see our congregations die, but we are not the first to do so and this normal cycle of seasons started before us and will continue long after us. The serenity prayer is very evocative of our congregational desire for wisdom: God grant me the serenity to change the things I can, to accept the things I cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference.

CONCLUSION

A spirituality of aging in consecrated life has been the focus of these reflections. After looking at the statistics of aging today, including aging in our congregations, I highlighted some of the qualities a spirituality of aging might entail. My invitation to each of you, as you read these reflections, is to take the leisure to write your own personal and congregational spirituality of aging, always recalling "the belt around your waist."

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DEMENTIA:

A Desperate Descent

Cecilia Raine

I was depressed for a lot of years; six, I think. I was not conscious of it until after it was over, after my father died in my home, in my arms. I also developed high blood pressure, but that may have happened anyway. After all, I had his genes. But this story is not just about me. My story is the story of countless, innumerable others. Let me be more exact. The latest statistics fix the number at 50 million. Fifty million people in the U.S. are involved in caregiving for elderly family members. And 75 to 80 percent of those being cared for by friends or family have some form of dementia. And so I am a drop in the bucket, a teaspoon of Ensure, a morsel of oatmeal compared to all the other beaten souls for whom the painful emotions of caring for an elderly parent with dementia are legion. And yet it seems that science has failed millions of people in this area. Science puts people on the moon, breaks genetic codes, finds cures for diseases and then joins the great groans of humanity in lamenting that there is not much science can do. And so just what is this pandemic plague upon the human mind? This debilitating ulcer on the graphs of human reasoning?

Dr. William Rodman Shankle is the founder of the University of California-Irvine Alzheimer's Center and the Shankle Clinic, which specializes in the diagnosis, management and treatment of Alzheimer's and other causes of

dementia. According to Dr. Shankle, the crucial consideration is to identify the cause of the dementia. Those types that are related to depression, drug interaction or thyroid problems might be reversible. Other types are not. Alzheimer's is one that is not reversible. Nearly 60 percent of all nursing home residents have Alzheimer's disease, and the average cost for nursing home care is \$42,000 per year. Perhaps that is why more than 7 out of 10 people with the disease live at home, with family and friends providing most of their care.

In my father's case, the cause was something called "multi-infarct dementia," or MID. His dementia was the result of a stroke, a vascular pop which bled in his brain. And here is where the story turns to be about him; about who he truly was before this abominable bang exploded in his mind.

Imagine if you will, a man with Ricky Ricardo eyes and hair. Stout and sporty, a 5' 9" third-baseman for West Point, my father was a genius and a giant. The Yankees had tried to snatch him, but he chose service to country instead. I saw photos, read newspaper clippings, so I know about this choice, even though I hadn't as yet been conceived. The French, for heaven's sake, gave him their *Croix de Guerre*, for defending them against the German V2's in World War II. There followed Harvard, M.I.T., and then the real memories.

He was Ward Cleaver with a sense of humor; the "Father Who Knew Best" without the metaphors and moralizing. His aim was straight and from the hip, military style. And yet he taught with a parlance that was mellowed with the wisdom of the classics. He was an aeronautical engineer who knew Aristotle. He taught absolutes because he knew logic and the laws of non-contradiction. Schooled in pedagogies that valued the mind and trained the memory, he knew Blake's "Elegy;" he could recite Shakespeare and Longfellow. In him was the unusual harmony of the intuitive muse and the rigorous logician. Because of him, I did not become a pot-head. Because of him, in the great "Age of Aquarius," I took a pass. When I married and had a family of my own, he was the sharp and assiduous grandpa who talked faith and reason, science and ontology to my sons. See them today and see his emblem emblazoned on their minds.

And then because of an absurd and freakish assault on his temporal lobe, he began to fade; he began to wither and decay. A member of Tom Brokaw's greatest generation, he suddenly and without warning turned atavistic; his gaze became somnolent and he appeared worn out.

During the first year we did exhausting rounds of physical and speech therapy. He learned to walk again, but not to talk, coherently, ever again. But the first year was the only year when things would get better. After that came walkers and wheelchairs; portable potties, bed banisters and tables on wheels; handi-wipes and night lights; incontinent pads and bibs; medications and flax seed oil; oatmeal and jello; eye doctors, teeth doctors, skin doctors and toenail doctors. There also came sore backs and saddened hearts. Many a night I lay weary, weeping into my pillow. Watching him helpless, shrinking away, was enough to make stones weep. And then came one of the most confounding and intolerable phenomena of the whole damnable syndrome: aggression.

Jacqueline Marcell has written what I consider one of the most resourceful and encompassing books on

carrying for aging parents with dementia, titled "Elder Rage." In it she chronicles her personal experiences with her father, in whom dementia had implanted the all-too-common disorder of aggression, which she labels the "Jekyll & Hyde" factor. In my father's case it did not involve shouting out obscenities and manipulative behavior. Perhaps there is a lesson here, since in his before-stroke days foul language and manipulation were not present in his character, although he did have a temper. But post-stroke, every once in awhile and for no apparent cause came a sudden act of violence. There were many of these, and there was no way to predict them, no way to prepare for them. Once, in front of friends, I bent down to kiss his cheek and he incomprehensively pushed my face away. The sequence was nonsensical, a defiance of law; it left me mortified. When one kisses someone's cheek, one is not supposed to receive a blow in return. Maybe I had coffee breath; maybe in some foggy place in his mind, he thought he should be presiding, since in social situations, my father always presided. At other times, however, the violence was more reasonable. I was often shoved and booted, especially while helping him in the bathroom. I don't think he knew that I knew how horrid those occasions were for him.

Raised on the Good Book and the lives of the saints, we managed to respond to my father's aggression by ignoring it and mustering up the charitable excuses his illness fittingly provided. In her book, Marcell makes the valuable point that when aggressive episodes arise, the caregiver should try to live in the reality of what is true for the loved one. She says to "agree, not contradict, question or use logic or reason." She also advises the use of "calm, non-threatening body language, distraction and reminiscence." Depending on the cause of the dementia, there are numerous drugs that may be helpful as well. In my father's case, the aggression eventually and spontaneously resolved itself on its own.

What has not been mentioned yet are all the good people. There are good people out there, people who will help

give the baths and change the diapers and who will view the old person, not as the living dead or half alive, but as a real person who is in pain. I advertised and interviewed and found a good woman from Brazil who understood that such is the human condition; the eternal persistence towards consciousness; the struggle to stay alive, no matter how intense the impairment, no matter how eroded the existence. "Eternal" is the key word here. While belief in eternity inspires tranquility, it does not free us of consequences; it does not free us of the responsibility to be our brother's keeper. We cannot, ever, betray the immeasurable propensity in each individual person toward life. We cannot say I believe, and then elude what those two words command regarding love of neighbor and the sanctity of each individual life.

In spite of the aggression, so commonplace in dementia, my father was heroic in his struggle. He tried; he tried *hard*.

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SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE LAUNCHES SLI CONNECT

“The medium is the message.” Quoting Marshall McLuhan, Canadian seminarian Santiago Rodriquez, S.J., observed that Pope Francis is a living example of this maxim. He went on to challenge readers of the blog run by the Jesuit seminarians, “The message is the Crucified and Risen Lord. Will you become the medium, a channel of his peace?” (March 20, 2013, (<http://www.ibosj.ca/2013/03/the-medium-is-message-pope-francis-and.html>)).

Everyone engaged in ministry in the Church seeks first to serve the Lord with gladness. If we are to do so well, those who encounter us must be experienced as “friends of the Bridegroom.”

Human formation matters; in fact, it matters the most. “The basic principle of human formation is that the human personality of the priest is to be a ‘bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of the human race’” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43).

Saint Luke Institute has been engaged in the work of human formation for decades. Our experience in the assessment, treatment and care of those engaged in ministry is at the heart of our mission. Experts in psychology and the spiritual life from the Institute travel around the world to offer in-person educational programs and consultation.



Most recently, our conversations with church leaders and those responsible for ministry formation have focused on how St. Luke Institute staff can share their expertise more effectively. Limited resources often prevent church leaders and formators from engaging in the study and reflection necessary for their own ongoing human formation. A new initiative of the Institute, SLIConnect.org, seeks to address this challenge.

SLIConnect.org is the resource of Saint Luke Institute for healthy human formation. We hope to support ministry leaders around the world by providing access to resources for self-development, skills for building healthy relationships, and tools for engaging in effective ministry. E-learning from Saint Luke Institute can help us encourage a culture of ongoing formation by making practical, relevant resources convenient and affordable for those in ministry.

SLIConnect.org also includes opportunities for in-person learning. Remote learning is not the entire solution. Coming together in community remains essential to human formation. Experts are available to visit local dioceses and religious

institutes, and annually there are regional and national conferences focused on specific topics associated with human formation. Often the e-learning experience leads to interest in further in-person learning experiences.

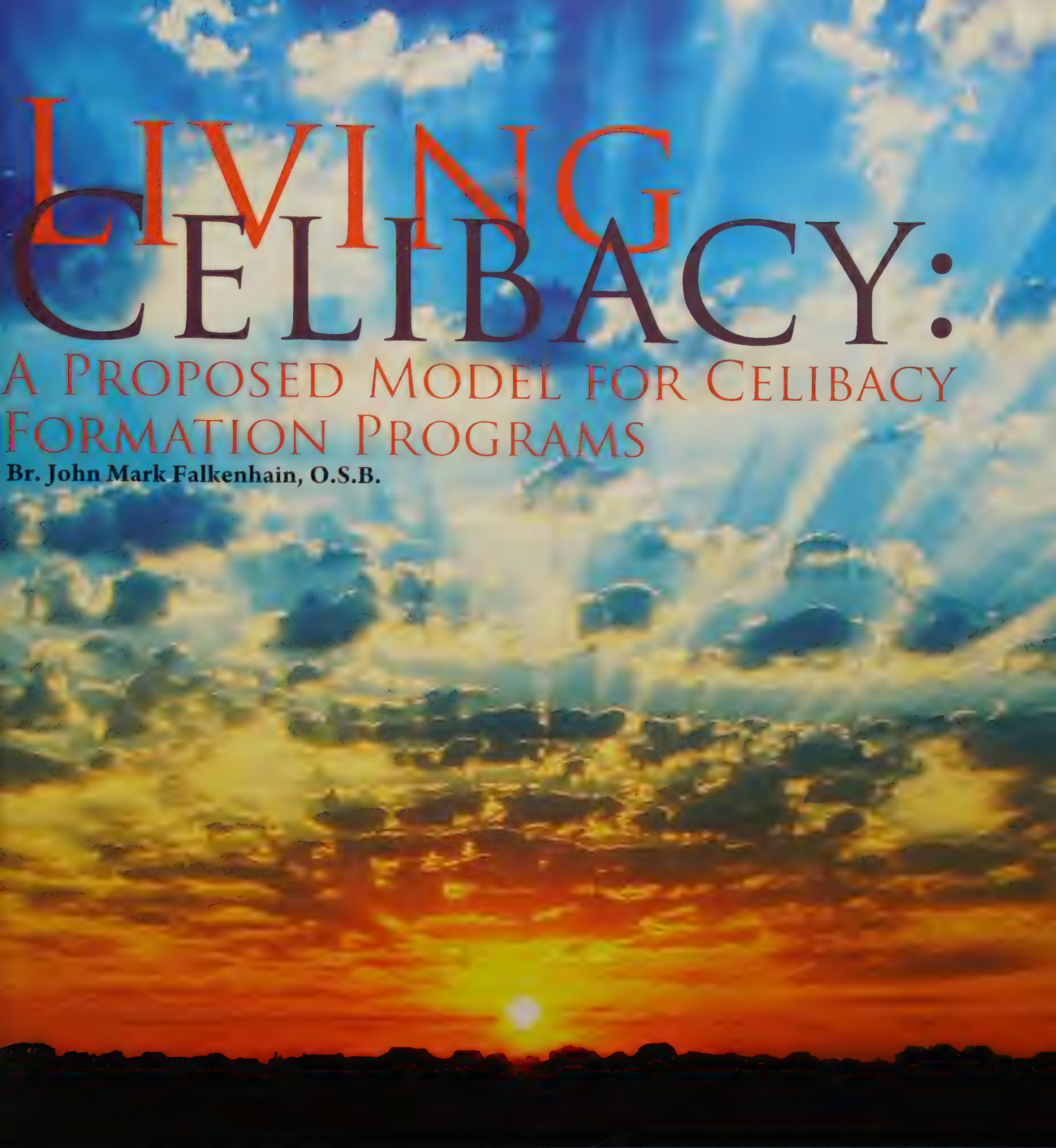
Everyone at Saint Luke Institute is committed to contributing to the message of the Good News. We seek to do so by sharing knowledge and expertise in the area of human formation.

The medium is the message. We all want to be a bridge to Christ. Please consider dedicating one hour a month to your own human formation. It will make all the difference for you and most especially for those whom you seek to love and serve.



SLIconnect.org

Connect. Grow. Renew.



LIVING CELIBACY:

A PROPOSED MODEL FOR CELIBACY FORMATION PROGRAMS

Br. John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B.

Forming men and women for a life of celibate chastity can be a daunting task for new and even established formation directors who struggle to identify the most appropriate content, systems of delivery, and resources available for their work. One of the particular challenges to celibacy formation lies in the fact that while the expectations of celibate chastity are fairly simple and straightforward (i.e., abstaining from marriage and genital sexual expression), the actual lived experience of celibacy is a highly complex phenomenon the experience of which differs greatly from individual to individual and across the course of a person's lifespan. Formation staff should ideally take into account both of these variables—individual differences and longitudinal factors—when constructing a celibacy formation program.

Despite the relative abundance of writings on the theology, history and spirituality of celibate chastity, a recent review of the literature uncovered few concrete and implementable models for formation.

Despite the relative abundance of writings on the theology, history and spirituality of celibate chastity, a recent review of the literature uncovered few concrete and implementable models for formation. Those available are targeted at priestly formation. *The Program for Priestly Formation*, Fifth Edition (2006), for example, offers a valuable list of skills to be fostered among candidates pursuing a life of clerical celibacy and goes on to identify the delivery systems to accomplish this work in the life of the seminary. These include: instruction; personal reflection; community life and feedback; application to the tasks of seminary life; formation advisors, mentors and directors; spiritual direction; and psychological counseling. In 1999, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) published a resource book for the celibacy formation of diocesan priests (Krenik, 1999). Here, Krenik proposes seven guiding elements to be used in celibacy formation with graduate seminarians: internalization of presbyteral values; pattern of contemplative prayer; capacity for solitude; age-appropriate psychosexual development; capacity for intimacy in human friendships; experience of community support; and accountability to others. The NCEA document, although brief, makes some helpful contributions by recommending some specific content, resources, and guiding questions for addressing each of these guiding principles of priestly celibacy formation. In our review of the literature, no published models for celibacy formation for men and women religious were identified.

This article represents an attempt to articulate a framework within which to construct celibacy formation programs adaptable to use in both seminaries and men's and women's religious communities. This framework has grown out of several years of work, reading and research in the areas of celibacy formation, human sexuality, and clergy child sexual offense. The heuristic values which underlie the model include:

- Providing a simple and concrete framework from which to begin constructing or continue organizing a program for celibacy formation.

- Providing a framework that is adaptable to both clerical and religious formation.
- Providing a framework which is consistent with the directives provided in the main formation documents for priestly formation – i.e., *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul, II, 1996) and the *Program for Priestly Formation*, Fifth Edition (2006).
- Providing a framework that can be used in both men's and women's communities.
- Providing a framework that accounts for individual differences among candidates.
- Providing a framework that is adaptable for screening purposes and ongoing formation.

A final note by way of introduction has to do with the distinction between celibacy and chastity. Within our Catholic teaching, chastity refers to the responsible living out of one's gift of sexuality, to which all Catholics are called. Celibacy refers to the more particular call to a life of abstinence from marriage and genital expressions of sexuality. Throughout this article, the terms "celibacy" and "celibate chastity" are used interchangeably. For our purposes, when the terms "celibacy" or "the celibate life" are used, the notion of chastity should also be assumed.

OVERVIEW

When approaching celibacy formation with the men and women I work with, I often begin by referring to celibacy as a "box" in which they have placed themselves, the parameters of which are clearly defined: abstaining from marriage and genital expressions of sexuality. While these parameters apply equally to everyone in the celibacy box, the subjective experience of living the chaste celibate life differs from person to person, and is influenced by a number of important factors which include (but are not necessarily limited to): one's motives for choosing celibacy; one's theology (or theologies) of celibacy; the sexual identity which he or she brings to the enterprise of celibacy; one's strengths and skills for living the celibate life; and finally, one's

• Sexual Identity:

Sex + Gender + Sexual Orientation

+History of Sexual Experiences

+Values & Attitudes Regarding Sex

personal limitations for living a life of celibate chastity.

This notion of celibacy as *lived experience* is summarized in the illustration above in which the solid outline represents the basic expectations that help to define the life of celibate chastity, and the contents within the box describe the factors that accommodate for each person's unique experience of living out the celibate commitment.

Building on the U.S. Bishops' insight that human formation, including celibacy formation, "happens in a three-fold process of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-gift" (PPF, 2006, p. 33), I would like to make two important assertions: (1) that these factors outlined above (i.e., motives for celibacy, theologies of celibacy, sexual identity, and strengths/skills and limitations for living celibate chastity) are those aspects of the self that men and women in formation must know and accept about themselves in order to make a free and healthy choice of celibate chastity; and (2) that these factors can serve as the broad outline or framework for an effective celibacy formation program. Within this framework, the primary goal of the celibacy formation program is to give candidates the information and skills needed to know and accept themselves along each of these dimensions.

For the remainder of this article, I would like to outline each of these variables and propose them as major content areas when building a model for initial or ongoing celibate formation.

MOTIVES FOR CELIBACY

To freely choose the celibate life, a young woman or man must have a clear sense of her or his motives. One of the first questions to ask is: "What has landed you in the celibacy box?" It is the most basic question; however,

I am frequently amazed at how little thought candidates have given it. "Are you choosing celibacy simply because it comes along with the territory of priesthood/religious life, or are there other reasons why you believe a life of celibacy will be a good and responsible way of living out your sexuality as a Christian?"

Of course, it is almost always the case that one's motives for celibacy are multiple and multi-layered—some known to the individual and some unknown or "subconscious," as we psychologists like to say. It is also likely that in the course of one's religious or priestly life, these motives may change, shift, become clearer or even be grown into.

Sr. Sandra Schneiders (2001) nicely addresses motives for celibacy in her book *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life*, and raises the question of valid versus invalid motives. She provides a fairly comprehensive list of what she considers invalid motives, including: fear of marriage, sexuality and parenthood; denial of one's sexual desires; unresolved parent issues; sexual naiveté; confusion about sexual orientation; desire for same-sex environment in which to gain access to possible sexual partners; and desire for an environment that will help control undesirable, dysfunctional, or addictive sexual behaviors or desires. Schneiders concludes that a candidate's motivation for choosing celibacy must not have psychosexual or psychosocial dysfunction at its roots, and this is a most important point. We have seen the tragic consequences, not only for the candidate but also for those who share his or her life, when a priest or religious has chosen celibacy as a means of avoiding painful questions about sexuality or even as a means of entering an arena in which to gratify harmful sexual impulses.

Without denying any of Schneiders' assertions, I would add a slight nuance by making the distinction between a person's initial and ultimate motives for choosing celibacy. While I agree whole-heartedly that one's motives at the time of ordination or final vows must be valid, healthy and capable of sustaining a life of celibate chastity, it is not unusual for individuals to make an initial choice of celibacy (i.e., when entering a formation program) based on less than valid motives. This distinction between initial versus ultimate motives recognizes the possibility that someone who has landed himself in the celibacy box for less healthy or invalid reasons, may in the course of initial formation grow into an understanding, love and motivation for celibacy that holds promise for a life of celibacy well lived.

Concerning motives for celibacy, four primary goals for formation stand out: (1) to clarify the candidate's initial motives for choosing celibacy (i.e., what has landed him/her in the celibacy box?); (2) to assist the candidate in evaluating the validity and health of these motives; (3) to assist the candidate in exploring additional, healthy motivating factors for living the celibate life; and finally (4) in the months leading to ordination or final profession, to assist the candidate in raising and answering the question: Do I currently have motivations that are capable of sustaining a life of celibate chastity with all of its particular challenges and opportunities for personal and spiritual growth?

This work of examining and exploring motives for celibacy ideally begins at initial screening, and continues throughout the course of initial formation with the likelihood of more and less intensive periods of exploration along the way. While one would certainly reach a point of diminishing returns by keeping the issue constantly on the radar, a routine

and regular raising of the question (once a semester, for example) emphasizes its importance and helps both the candidate and the formation directors see patterns of thought and understanding related to this most important question. The work of examining motives occurs in a variety of formation settings, including spiritual direction, reading, coursework, interviews with more experienced community members, meetings with formation personnel and individual counseling.

Some questions that might help direct this work include:

1. Why do you think you have chosen a life of celibate chastity, so far?
2. How have your motives for living the celibate life changed in the course of formation?
3. Can you imagine yourself in another vocation that doesn't require celibacy?
4. If celibacy were not required of priests, do you think you would still choose to be celibate?

THEOLOGIES OF CELIBACY

Ultimately, our strongest motives for living the celibate life are theological.

Like most disciplines that we embark upon in the spiritual life, celibacy is not an end unto itself, but rather a means to some further end, for example, "for the sake of the kingdom," or to achieve an "undivided love for Christ." Common to all theologies of celibacy is the notion that its practice must result in conversion to Christ and an increased capacity for love—love of God and love of neighbor, including an increased capacity to be the recipient of God's and our neighbor's love.

There are, of course, many theologies of celibacy some of which are historically linked to contemplative traditions while others grow out of more apostolic expressions of religious and clerical life. Celibacy as a means of freeing one's time, energies and availability to serve a wider group of people (i.e., "Celibacy for the sake of the kingdom") is a theology that fits particularly well with diocesan priesthood and life in apostolic religious orders. A spousal theology of celibacy which emphasizes the celibate as pursuing an undivided or unmediated love for Christ ought to find particular emphasis among celibacy formation programs in contemplative communities. Celibacy as asceticism, as a means of conquering the passions, and as a means of participating more deeply in the life of Christ,

are also important theologies of celibacy linked to different charisms within the church.

There is benefit in exploring the range of theologies of celibacy with seminarians and with young religious regardless of the apostolic or contemplative bent that characterizes their particular vocation's charism. All of these theologies support, help to motivate, and give meaning to the celibate life, the challenges and realities of which are likely to shift over the course of a single priestly or religious life.

When planning a formation curriculum to verse newcomers in the theologies of celibacy, formation personnel will likely want to begin by surveying the church's theology of sexuality with particular emphasis on the notion of chastity. These are foundational pieces which help candidates to recognize their particular call to celibacy as rooted in the broader call to chastity, a call which they share with married couples and single people living in the church. The *Catechism* and Pope John Paul's "Theology of the Body" are popular and excellent resources for addressing the more general topic of Catholic sexuality. For a survey of theologies of celibacy, Schneiders (2001) again offers a nice overview within an historical context. Building on these more foundational



pieces, formation personnel may look to the writings of their community's founders, the church fathers and mothers, and particular saints or theologians associated with their tradition to flesh out the theology and spirituality of celibacy associated with their community's charism.

An intellectual understanding of the theologies of celibacy gained through instruction and reading should then be complemented by instruction in and opportunities for practicing theological reflection on the celibate life. Theological reflection assists the candidate in deepening and personalizing his or her theological understanding of what it means to live the celibate life. The young man or woman who spends time looking for and recognizing the promised fruits of celibacy is not only likely to remain faithful to that promise in the long run, but also to hone and fine tune skills for celibacy and conversion as his or her priestly or religious life continues.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

Thomas Aquinas teaches that "grace builds on nature" and it is precisely our human nature, and in particular our nature as sexual beings, that one brings to the enterprise of celibate chastity. Sexual identity, then, is the third major component to be addressed in this model of celibacy formation.

Both *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II, 1992) and the *Program for Priestly Formation*, Fifth Edition (2006) underscore the importance of a responsible education in human sexuality, properly integrated into the larger context of human formation and formation for celibate chastity. Here, perhaps more than other dimensions of celibacy formation, formation personnel may feel at a loss in knowing exactly what to cover and who is best qualified to teach this material. Additionally, directors may feel shy or simply unqualified to address issues of human sexuality with young men and women whose knowledge and experience may be more extensive than their own. Given the complexity and sometimes skewed nature of information available in the area of human sexuality, it is

recommended that formation personnel work at building a relationship with a medical or mental health professional or agency who is both qualified in understanding the body of research literature on human sexuality and also able to appreciate the complexity of these issues as they interface with our Catholic faith. Treatment centers around the country which specialize in work with clergy and religious are excellent resources for help along these lines.

In my work with men in formation, I progress along a five-factored model of sexual identity that serves both as an outline for course material, and as a framework for understanding what constitutes a healthy and integrated sexual identity. This model is expressed in an equation of sorts:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Sexual Identity} = & \\ \text{Sex} + & \\ \text{Gender} + & \\ \text{Sexual Orientation} + & \\ \text{History of Sexual Experiences} + & \\ \text{Values \& Attitudes regarding Sexuality} & \end{aligned}$$

Just as our identity is complex and highly individual, so is our sexual identity complex and particular to the person. When screening men and women for seminary or religious life, I typically ask candidates to describe themselves as a sexual person. Candidates often reduce their sexual identities to their sexual history and some reduce their identities to their sexual orientation. Few are able to articulate a sense of themselves as sexual beings beyond these ideas. I will briefly describe these five facets included in my working model of sexual identity.

One's **sex**, technically speaking, is one's biologically determined status as male or female. Sex, as opposed to gender, is a dichotomous phenomenon: we are either male or female. Our sex is determined by chromosomes and unfolds in our physiology as a result of critical periods in the second trimester of pregnancy and at puberty. With the extremely rare exceptions of Androgen-Insensitivity Disorder and Adrenogenital Syndrome, one's sex is straightforward and typically not a source of great confusion for young men and women.

Gender is a more continuous, psychological and subjective sense of one's self as male or female. When talking about gender, we use the language of masculinity and femininity to describe constructs that are influenced by many factors, including our sex, our environment, the larger culture, and social expectations. Every culture has a range of models and norms linked to what it means to be masculine and feminine and these form the basis of many gender stereotypes. While addressing issues of gender, it is useful to explore the idea of androgyny, in the correct meaning of that construct. Often misconstrued as gender neutrality, androgyny more accurately refers to an individual's capacity to incorporate qualities and personality characteristics stereotypically associated with the opposite gender into his or her personality without necessarily compromising the individual's primary sense of himself as male or herself as female. A priest who aims to increase his capacity for patience, listening, emotional support, and appreciation of beauty, for example, might be considered androgynous. The research literature on androgyny suggests that it is associated with certain desirable personal and interpersonal characteristics such as higher levels of behavioral flexibility, competence, confidence in decisions and nurture (Crooks & Baur, 2005).

Sexual orientation has to do with the "primary and persistent" targets of our sexual arousal (Ellis & Mitchell, 2000), and is typically described using the terms heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. In our culture and in many others, there are strong social desirability factors associated with sexual orientation that sometimes play a role in one's identifying him- or herself as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. Adding to the effects of social desirability, arguments in various circles of discourse around issues of cause, choice, changeability and morality of sexual orientation can also complicate the path for some in arriving at a clear understanding and acceptance of his or her sexual orientation. It is especially important that vocations and formation staff have access to accurate scientific information as well as

a thorough knowledge of church teaching on their way to establishing a clear and consistent set of policies and practices related to admission and formation of individuals with homosexual or bisexual orientations. Formation programs that avoid addressing issues of sexual orientation may inadvertently communicate that the issue is either taboo or unimportant, or may enable a young man or woman to continue living in a state of confusion regarding his or her sexual orientation. Research on clergy sexual offenders points to confusion about one's sexual orientation (rather than a particular heterosexual or homosexual orientation) as a key factor contributing to sexual offense against minors (John Jay College Research Team, 2011; Rossetti, 1996).

History of sexual experiences is a fourth factor that helps to make up one's sexual identity. This includes an individual's history of dating, sexual activity and the possibilities of harmful, extreme and deviant sexual experiences (e.g., victim of abuse, perpetrator of abuse, high-risk sexual behaviors, promiscuity, sexual activity in early childhood). An individual with an extensive history of sexual activity may have a very different experience of celibacy than someone who has never dated, held hands, or even imagined themselves as married or in a committed relationship with another. Equally important as one's history of sexual experiences are the reasons and motivations that have resulted in that history. A 30-year-old candidate who has never dated or engaged in any kind of physical affection with another adult should be invited at the time of screening and again in the course of formation to explore why he or she has never considered these as possibilities. An additional topic to be addressed both in screening and education of candidates is Internet pornography use. Vocation and formation personnel should not be surprised by the high incidence of Internet pornography use among young men and women, and education about indicators of compulsivity and addiction relative to Internet pornography is recommended for both vocations and formation personnel and candidates alike.

Finally, one's **values and attitudes regarding sexuality** are an important factor in how we experience and express ourselves as sexual people. These attitudes may include repulsion, fear, avoidance or distrust of sexuality in general, as well as attitudes related to more specific sexual topics such as homosexuality, premarital sex, sex roles, gender stereotypes, respect for members of the opposite sex and comfort around sexual stimuli. Our attitudes and values are typically formed by parents in the early and middle childhood years, and then influenced more heavily by peers and the broader culture throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Faith and religious experience are also important potential influences on the development of a person's attitudes and values regarding sexuality.

When it comes to screening and educating candidates in the area of sexual identity, formation personnel should be looking for integrity or internal consistency among these five dimensions. We might say that one's sexual identity has a sense of integrity when all parts of his or her sexual identity are known and working well together. Particular concerns arise when different dimensions of one's sexual identity are repressed or when they come into conflict with one another. Such conflicts can result in internal dissonance that can further result in extreme defensiveness and limitations in one's ability to enter freely into the experience of formation and ministry. A young woman, for example, whose overly harsh and negative values about homosexuality is in conflict with her experience of herself as attracted to other women may become compartmentalized, intellectualized or even avoidant in order to deal with that tension. These concerns may play out in problematic ways, for example, when entering into conversations about sexuality in formation. Such tensions might also affect her ministry and community life with those who, in one way or another, remind her of these threatening attractions or unacceptable parts of her identity.

Again, formation staff may wish to collaborate with mental health professionals who can assist in suggesting

readings and offering instruction, workshops, and counseling services when requested or needed.

SKILLS AND LIMITATIONS FOR CELIBATE CHASTITY

Finally, formation staff must be able to foster and evaluate a candidate's skills for celibate living. *The Program for Priestly Formation, Fifth Edition* (2006) provides a helpful list of skills to be fostered among clerical candidates, and these include: appropriate self-disclosure; capacity for self-reflection; capacity for solitude; ability to hold all persons in the mystery of God; vigilance and mastery over one's impulses; capacity for peer relationships; effective boundary setting; care for others; commitment to mastering sexual temptations; and capacity for giving and receiving love.

Both the *Program for Priestly Formation and Pastores dabo vobis* underscore the importance of "affective maturity" in the life of the celibate. Carolyn Saarni (2000) articulates a set of eight skills associated with emotional competence that may serve nicely as benchmarks for assessing and fostering affective maturity. They include: awareness of one's emotional state; skill in discerning others' emotions; skill in naming emotions; capacity for sympathy and empathy; skill in adaptively coping with unpleasant emotions; awareness of the relationship between the type/quality of relationship and the immediacy and genuineness of emotional display (i.e. boundaries); and capacity for emotional self-efficacy.

While it would be impossible to list of all the skills helpful to a life of celibate chastity, a few others come to mind as particularly important: a healthy and regular prayer life; insight into the effects of one's emotions on behavior; capacity for vulnerability in relationships; impulse control; ability to delay gratification; capacity to deal with loneliness; social problem-solving skills; and the ability to rely on close relationships for support and personal accountability.

The work of fostering skills for celibacy happens across a variety of settings. Lectures, readings and workshops

are important for imparting basic information. Opportunities for sharing experiences and even practicing emotional and social problem-solving skills via case-studies or scenarios can translate ideas into the experiential realm. Spiritual direction, counseling, the daily dynamics of relationships within community, and even the occasional challenges to celibate living provide endless and important opportunities for growth.

With respect to the limitations that one brings to the celibate experience, these often look like the absence of those characteristics listed in the skills section. Here the celibacy formation program must aim at helping the candidate grow in awareness of his or her limitations, then proceed to assist the candidate in remediating these when possible, and finally evaluating how to weigh these limitations in the final decision as to whether to take a life-long vow of celibate chastity.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have outlined a model or framework for celibacy formation which emphasizes celibacy as a lived experience and which attempts to leave room for individual differences and a trajectory of growth over the course of formation and the rest of a celibate's lifetime. A primary goal has been to articulate a model that is, on the one hand, broad enough to be applied to formation settings in both seminaries and religious communities, and specific enough to give formation staff clear direction in planning their work in celibacy formation. While the primary emphasis has been on the utility of this model for initial formation, there are clear applications of the framework for screening and ongoing formation as well.

Any program for celibacy formation should be considered a work in progress—one that improves as a result of regular program evaluation and the sharing of ideas with other professionals who do the work of celibacy formation in the church. One of the goals in writing up this model has been to initiate a collaborate research program between Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary and Saint Luke Institute, aimed at

identifying best practices in celibacy formation. We expect this research project to culminate in a national conference for vocation and formation personnel on the topic of models of celibacy formation in Fall 2015.

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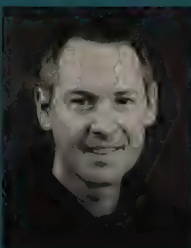
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and presenting workshops for groups of priests, religious and seminarians on issues including psychosocial and psychosexual adjustment, religious formation, and the future of religious communities.

A Call for Life-Long Spirituality

A hand is visible on the right side of the page, reaching out towards a bright, glowing light source in the upper right. The background is a soft-focus image of a field of tall, golden-brown grass or wheat under a bright sky.

PRIESTS IN TROUBLE: THREE TYPICAL CASES

Fathers A, B, and C are typical of some of the priests that I have seen in my private clinical practice during the past several decades. Details have been altered to maintain confidentiality.

Fr. A was referred by his bishop after the parish secretary found adult male pornographic materials on an office computer. After an investigation it was determined that Fr. A had regularly viewed pornography on both his personal and parish office computer. Fr. A was referred for a psychological evaluation and was not pleased to be forced to see a psychologist about his pornography activities. Over several evaluation sessions Fr. A admitted that he would engage in online pornography use, masturbation and excessive alcohol use "as a reward for myself at the end of a stressful week." He was pastor of a busy local parish. He lived alone in the church rectory, had primary responsibilities for his busy and diverse parish and church school, and received only occasional help from other priests who were very busy as well. He was a fairly new pastor, recently assigned to a parish located far from his previous parish assignments within the geographically large diocese. He claimed few friends and felt uncomfortable socializing with parishioners since he felt that he always had to be in his role as priest and could never really relax in the company of others. He admitted that his prayer life was neglected since he was so busy with parish and school duties. He found solace in pornography and alcohol use which became a quick and regular habit.

and Psychological Formation of Priests

Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D., A.B.P.P.



Fr. B is an international priest and was born, trained and ordained overseas. He came to the United States initially on a sabbatical leave and over time received permission to stay; he was incardinated within a local diocese. He is a talented and friendly person who enjoys soccer, cooking and socializing. He was assigned to a parish in a geographically large and rural location with few active and engaged Catholics. Those most active in the parish are immigrants from Mexico who work in local farming activities. Fr. B speaks very little Spanish and is not familiar with Mexican culture and traditions. He lives alone in the parish rectory; it is several hours away from his local bishop and the more urban parts of the diocese where there are more Catholics in general and priests in particular. He was self-referred for consultation after admitting to his bishop that he was becoming depressed, lonely and highly stressed. He desired companionship and spiritual direction but the closest priest was miles away and was quite elderly.

Fr. C was referred for consultation by his bishop since many parishioners had complained about him and many have left the parish in recent years citing conflicts with Fr. C. Fr. C doesn't like the active engagement of laypersons in church activities including "bossy women." Additionally, he has a great deal of difficulty with any assertive and opinionated lay person. He feels that as the only priest in the parish he should have the final say on all church matters and not be questioned. He states that where he comes from, priests are treated with much more respect and deference and that woman in particular are quiet. Fr. C can be very controlling, demanding, can show his temper and is reported to micromanage everyone around him. Fr. C admits that he has no friends, is isolated, and finds it stressful working in the church today. He says that he doesn't really understand modern Catholics very well. His bishop felt that he doesn't know what to do with Fr. C.

Much has been written in this magazine and elsewhere about priestly formation among seminarians. Seminaries have done a great deal in recent decades to help future priests in their spiritual and psychological development (Coleman, 2006; United States

Conferences of Catholic Bishops, 2006). The four pillars of priestly formation outlined in *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II, 1992) well underscores the importance of spiritual and psychological formation for the development of a healthy and well-balanced priest (United States Conferences of Catholic Bishops, 2006). These efforts should be applauded and have perhaps resulted in happier and healthier priests (Rossetti, 2011). Clearly the emphases on the four pillars of seminary formation have and will continue to assist priests and the church at large become healthier and stronger.

However, once a priest has completed seminary training and becomes ordained, what efforts are there to ensure that psychological and spiritual development and nurturance continues? What efforts are made to ensure that priests are attending to their psychological and spiritual needs and development?

Unlike many professionals such as physicians, nurses, psychologists, licensed counselors of all types, attorneys and so forth, there are no mandated continuing education requirements to renew credentials as a priest. Certainly local bishops, vicars for clergy and others in church leadership do what they can to help encourage and support their priests but too often ongoing spiritual and psychological formation and development is secondary to other, perhaps more pressing and immediate, concerns of the church. The numerous pressing needs of parish and church life make what was so important in seminary training seem optional in the ongoing life of priests. This is especially concerning for a number of compelling reasons due to the emerging confluence of factors in recent years that have changed the nature of priestly life (Cozzens, 2000). These particularly include the fact that (1) current priests are stretched too thin in recent decades, (2) excess responsibilities results in less time, energy, and interest in self-care, and (3) being alone a great deal of the time means less opportunities for support and corrective feedback.

PRIESTS ARE STRETCHED TOO THIN

During the 1960s there were more than 60,000 ordained priests

in the United States. Now we have less than 45,000 with a much larger Catholic population today than in the 1960s. With about 23% of the 300 million Americans identified as being Catholic, there are approximately 70 million Catholics in America (Cozzens, 2000). The increase in the Catholic population, especially due to immigration from Latin America, means many more Catholics to serve, yet doing so with fewer available priests. Financial problems and demographic shifts have also resulted in closing or combining many parishes (especially in the northeastern and upper Midwestern parts of the United States); many priests are asked to cover multiple parishes as well. Fewer priests also means that parish rectories often have only one or maybe two priests living in them. Significant age, language and cultural differences among these priests add additional difficulties to rectory living today. So, fewer and more diverse priests with many more demands mean that today's priests are busier than ever and have much less support than in earlier generations. Although priests generally report that they are happy with their lives even with these stressors present (Rossetti, 2011), these challenges are certainly not a recipe for good psychological and spiritual health over time.

Fathers A, B, and C in the cases above are typical examples of some of the problems that can easily unfold when priests are stretched thin. Problematic coping strategies such as alcohol abuse and the use of pornography for Fr. A, loneliness, depression and isolation for Fr. B, and frustration, wishing for a perceived better time of the church in the past and a lack of corrective feedback for Fr. C., are taking their toll on their functioning and are increasing the likelihood that they will stumble inside and outside of ministry.

BEING EXTREMELY BUSY MEANS LESS TIME DEVOTED TO SELF-CARE

If priests are stretched thin with numerous responsibilities then self-care can often go by the wayside. Attending to continuing spiritual and psychological development is typically hard to

manage when one is trying to cover the many responsibilities of one or more parishes, often as the only priest available. Ongoing spiritual direction, psychological care and support, physical fitness, recreation and so forth often get put on the back burner for many priests today. There is simply not enough time and energy to proactively attend to these needs. Again, this is not a recipe for good psychological and spiritual health over time.

Fr. A in the above example engages in health-damaging behaviors (e.g., alcohol abuse, pornography use) while Fathers B and C are at risk for acting out.

BEING ALONE MEANS LESS SUPPORT AND CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

Religious order priests living in community and diocesan priests of an earlier time living in rectories with several other priests had the ongoing possibility for support and corrective feedback regarding their lifestyles, decision-making and self-care (whether it was welcomed or not). Living alone, or essentially alone, means that there are few if any opportunities for ongoing support and corrective feedback from fellow priests. We all need someone looking out for us or helping to support our needs and goals. The lack of corrective feedback means that it is easy to drift into problematic behaviors, bad habits or ignore self-care. Drinking too much, engaging in pornography use, ignoring prayer life, developing poor attitudes and so forth can more easily be indulged when no one is watching and offering supportive corrective feedback. Bad habits can form without being nipped in the bud by a caring fellow priest living in the same quarters. Once again, this is not a recipe for good psychological and spiritual health over time.

Thus, the changing landscape of priests in the U.S. creates a perfect storm for neglecting spiritual and psychological development and care. Too few priests, too many demands, and the lack of the structured formation of seminary all combine to erode whatever psychological and spiritual development occurred while in seminary training. These psychological and spiritual

muscles will atrophy without ongoing training and attention. So what can be done to improve and nurture priests after seminary when it comes to their spiritual and psychological health and well-being?

All good intentions may not result in a significant increase in available priests or fewer demands of them. We must cope with the challenges that face our priests and church now (Cozzens, 2000, Manuel, 2012). Certainly more high quality priestly vocations can help but we cannot depend on changing the now-several decade trajectories of fewer priest and more priestly demands. The following include four strategies that might help with nurturing the spiritual and psychological development of priests in an ongoing manner following ordination. These strategies will not necessarily be easy to implement for all clerics and they may involve unintended and unforeseen consequences, but perhaps they are at least steps in the right direction.

Fr. A in the above example certainly drifted into problematic coping behaviors while Fr. C developed hardened attitudes that are destructive. Fr. B is at risk too unless he can get adequate attention regarding his self-care.

FOUR STEPS

1. Encourage and perhaps require all priests to have an ongoing spiritual direction and formation plan reviewed and approved by their religious superior or bishop.

Ongoing spiritual direction and formation can certainly enhance lifelong spiritual growth, renewal and deepening of faith. Appropriate and adequately trained spiritual directors could be identified and made available to all priests. It is understandable that not all spiritual directors will be priests themselves. Appropriately trained and credentialed non-clerics could be utilized, and if distance prevents spiritual direction from occurring in person on a regular basis, then contemporary technologies such as Skype, Face-Time, and other social media tools could be employed. Having all priests maintain a relationship with a spiritual director and mentor throughout their lives may be an important step in the right direction for

Ongoing spiritual direction, psychological care and support, physical fitness, recreation and so forth often get put on the back burner for many priests today.

ongoing spiritual formation and growth after ordination. The frequency and intensity of contact may differ but at least having a spiritual director to rely on is a reasonable goal for all priests.

2. Encourage and perhaps require all priests to have some ongoing psychosocial direction, formation, and a consultation plan reviewed and approved by their religious superior or bishop.

Ongoing consultation with a mental health professional, counselor, life coach, psychologist or someone appropriately trained and credentialed in psychosocial factors and health could be employed and made available to all priests. Again, social media could be utilized if needed when geographic challenges are such that regular in-person meetings are not possible. Having an identified psychosocial consultant could help to support and nurture priests in an ongoing way over time.

3. Create a culture within the church to support priests from multiple sources.

The clergy abuse crisis during the past decade has certainly tarnished the Catholic Church in general and perhaps all priests in particular (Plante & McChesney, 2011). Sadly, too many people assume that priests cannot be trusted with children and are pedophiles. The church and individual priests have lost much of their credibility and moral authority. Finding nurturing support as people in general and as priests in particular is difficult.

The church can always do more to support priests with whatever resources are available, but laypersons could also be mobilized to offer organized and structured support to priests as well. It can be challenging for priests to socialize and allow themselves to be vulnerable among parishioners. They may find it hard to let their guard down, be themselves and open themselves up to congregants. Socializing with parishioners can create dual relationships and boundary challenges, so thoughtful and careful approaches must be employed to find reasonable and appropriate ways for laypersons to support priests.

Developing a culture of support may take time and effort since too often Catholics just assume that priests have

all of the support that they need. Priests need recreation, exercise, hobbies and friends. Perhaps laypersons in adjacent parishes could “adopt” priests in other parishes such that supportive activities and friendships could be nurtured, with no professional or priestly expectations. Careful and thoughtful networks could be organized and structured to assist priests in obtaining support outside of their professional duties and away from parish life.

4. Continuing education strategies used among health care and other professionals could be employed to help priests address their psychological and spiritual development over time.

Continuing education models that have been developed and perfected in many industries could be used with priests to help encourage ongoing psychological and spiritual formation. In-person and online educational programs can be developed and utilized to assist priests with psychological and spiritual development. There are many excellent resources that are engaging and informative that could be made available to clerics. Perhaps a certain number of continuing education hours could be required of clerics in order to assist them in attending to psychological and spiritual formation.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church and priests have many complex challenges today. Certainly the spiritual and psychological formation has become a critical part of seminarians’ training. Now, we need to go to the next step to ensure that priestly formation continues throughout the life of all priests and does not come to an abrupt end at ordination. Attending to the spiritual and psychological care and development of all priests must be a high priority for everyone in the church to better ensure a healthy priesthood now and in the foreseeable future. To achieve these goals, the four general steps outlined above may help to move the ball forward.

Fathers A, B and C described at the beginning of this article may have been able to avoid many of their troubles if these steps were taken. If we want to maximize the health and well-being

of priests we must take these issues seriously. The troubles of Fathers A, B and C are not unusual but they are preventable.

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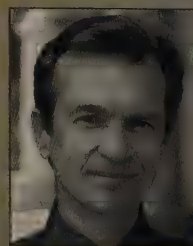
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Louis J. Cameli

The Challenge and Hope

of Fostering the Moral Formation of Young People Today



No matter who we are—educators, people in ministry or parents—we want what is best for our children and young people. In a Christian context, we want them to lead good lives as followers of Jesus Christ. We want them to be faithful daughters and sons of God led by the Holy Spirit. We want them to have a reliable moral compass that can offer them direction in navigating the often-turbulent waters of life. We also know that our desire for the genuine and effective moral formation of our children and young people is not a simple matter.

In a different form, this paper was presented at the Chicago Catechetical Conference, 21 October 2011. Biblical citations are from NRSV Catholic Edition (1991).

When asked to describe a moral dilemma they had faced, two-thirds couldn't answer the question or described problems that are not moral at all.

Moral formation does not happen automatically or easily. The context of moral formation, for example, is a complicated intersection of psychology, culture and faith. Competing voices and competing values daily claim the attention of our children and young people. Then add to the mix our own often-felt sense of inadequacy. We wonder if we are up to the task. All this makes the moral formation of young people today absolutely daunting and yet also completely urgent. So, how can we avoid paralysis because of the complexity? How can we take some positive and constructive steps forward?

A good beginning, I would suggest, is a clear understanding of the challenges that we face. Then, we need to retrieve solid foundations for moral formation, foundations that belong to the center of our faith. This understanding and retrieval will not resolve every issue. We will, however, be able to move forward and to make a beginning with a confidence that we often seem to lack. In these reflections, I will first give extended attention to the challenges of moral formation for children and young people today. In a second step, I will offer what I have come to understand as the foundations for moral formation drawn from our tradition of biblical faith.

WHAT DO WE FACE?

Essential reading for anyone interested in the moral lives of young people is Christian Smith's recently published book *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, and his colleagues have been tracking the spiritual and religious lives of teens and young people for a number of years. Previous books that have emerged from these studies include: Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

In *Lost in Transition*, Christian Smith and his colleagues share the

results of detailed interviews with early young adults. The book yields a troubling picture of young people who lack the moral frameworks or even the proper vocabulary to broach moral questions.

In his column in *The New York Times* (September 13, 2011), commentator David Brooks captured the heart of Smith's conclusions concerning the moral formation of the young adults he interviewed. Permit me to cite Brooks' summary.

The interviewers asked open-ended questions about right and wrong, moral dilemmas and the meaning of life. In the rambling answers . . . you see young people groping to say anything sensible on these matters. But they just don't have the categories or vocabulary to do so . . . When asked to describe a moral dilemma they had faced, two-thirds couldn't answer the question or described problems that are not moral at all, like whether they could afford to rent a certain apartment or whether they had enough quarters to feed the meter at a parking spot . . . When asked about wrong or evil, they could generally agree that rape and murder are wrong. But, aside from these extreme cases, moral thinking didn't enter the picture, even when considering things like drunken driving, cheating in school or cheating on a partner.

Here are four quotes that come directly from Christian Smith's interviews.

1. "I don't really deal with right and wrong that often."
2. "It's personal. It's up to the individual. Who am I to say?"
3. "I would do what I thought would make me happy or how I felt. Because I have no other way of knowing what to do but how I internally feel. That's where my decisions come from. From me. My decisions come from inside of me."
4. "Normally you're not like, 'Oh, I'm gonna go commit a murder today.' But then there's certain things where I'm like, 'Oh screw it, I'm going with what I think is my gut feeling.' And



that might not necessarily be the right thing. But if it's me fighting against my gut feelings or my emotions, that's where it gets really difficult. If it's emotional, I have a difficult time fighting that off. I usually give in."

These quotes are drawn from Smith's first chapter appropriately entitled "Morality Adrift." Subsequent chapters fill out a troubling picture of young adults with regard to consumerism, intoxication with drugs and alcohol, sexual activity and civic and political disengagement.

Before identifying a few conclusions about the moral formation of the young people whom Christian Smith has studied, I want to offer two qualifications. Please note that with Smith and others, I do not think that it is fair or accurate to characterize the generation studied in *Lost in Transition* as evil or immoral. By no means is this true. What is true, however, is that the culture and older generations have failed these young people in the communication of moral frameworks, moral vocabulary and guiding values. A second qualification needs to be made. Smith and his colleagues did not specifically study Catholic young adults. They are certainly included in the study, but the range of inquiry was far more general. Later, I will identify some specifics concerning our Catholic young people.

At this point, in light of Christian Smith's work and my interpretation of it, I can offer some conclusions about a large number (not necessarily all) of early young adults and moral formation. These young adults seem to lack four things:

- a moral framework for their lives
- a vocabulary or language to express moral questions and directions
- tools for moral reasoning
- an explicit sense of higher purpose or transcendence.

Because these elements—which many of us are accustomed to assume for ourselves—are missing for them, they collapse into themselves. Psychological categories dominate: "How do I feel?" Their perspective is very individualistic and largely removed from the context of others: "It's about me." Finally, there is no stable or objective grounding for values that are always shifting, always relative: "Who am I to say?"

In my introduction, I indicated that the challenges for those committed to the moral formation of young people are truly daunting. I think the data that we have examined to this point give clear evidence of that. I am also convinced that we can deepen our understanding of the challenges by considering their origin. History provides guidance.

HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT THIS POINT?

How did we ever get to the point that we currently face: a whole generation that seems to be morally adrift and without the means that we have come to know as essential for the moral navigation of life? The David Brooks article that I mentioned earlier references another important book that gives us a thumbnail sketch of the history of moral education in the United States: James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Drawing on James Davison Hunter's study and my own observations, I want to offer a quick tour of the history of moral education or moral formation in the United States. Historical context sharpens our understanding of the current situation of young people.

Protestantism, of course, left its strong mark on the beginnings of our nation. For example, the Calvinist sense of human nature corrupted by original sin decisively shaped the understanding of human persons and, therefore, the requirements and directions for effective moral formation. In the colonial period and into the early years of an independent United States, moral training was and had to be coercive because of the then-current and generally shared



understanding of human nature. Schools and homes did not hesitate to use shame, guilt and physical discipline to form children who, so trained, would become godly and upright. In the nineteenth century, things softened a bit. Of course, there was Bible reading in the public schools, but with the arrival of new immigrant populations, there was also a movement to be less sectarian in the schools. Discipline continued, but it was not as harsh as it had been previously.

A major shift occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it was due in great measure to the enormously influential philosopher of education John Dewey, who formed generations of teachers in America. In his pragmatic and empirical framework, Dewey dismissed supernatural foundations for moral and character formation. His focus—and this is absolutely decisive for shaping education in the U.S. through the twentieth century and into our own—fell on the child's experience. Education generally and character formation particularly no longer had to do with imposing something extraneous in the child's life. Rather, education and formation now sought to elicit the experience of students and to build them up by building from within them.

Throughout the twentieth century, various theoreticians elaborated on this child-centered and subjective approach to education and formation. Familiar names include Jean Piaget for cognitive development, Lawrence Kohlberg for moral development, and Doctor Benjamin Spock for child rearing generally. Although other persons and forms of social interaction might figure into their general framework, specialists in children's development emphasized children's individual and psychological growth with a strong accent on their sense of well-being. In other words, what seemed to matter most was individual experience and feeling good about oneself.

In the 1960s and into subsequent decades, an approach to moral formation called "values clarification" took hold of educators' imagination and, in some measure, even entered the precincts of Catholic religious education. The best known exponent of values clarification is Sidney Simon. Values clarification focused on the clarification of children's values, again a personal and subjective process and a natural outgrowth of attention to individual experience.

More recently, in educational circles, the cultivation of personal values

and learning how to make good decisions has looked to self-esteem as foundational. The assumption is quite simple: if children and young people feel good about themselves, they will do the right thing. There is some measure of plausibility about this assumption. In fact, however, it does not work. Most especially in critical situations, it does not work.

Educating young people "to do the right thing" in two critical areas, using drugs and sexual activity, when based exclusively or mainly on self-esteem has proven to be ineffective. The studies cited by James Davison Hunter in *The Death of Character* substantiate this conclusion. For example, D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) has been a program designed to discourage the use of drugs among young people. The thinking goes that if only they have sufficient self-esteem, they will not need drugs and they will also be able to resist peer pressure to use them. It has not worked. Similarly, abstinence-based programs that rely exclusively or mainly on self-esteem with the premise that if young people feel good about themselves, they will not engage in sexual activity, do not work in any long-term way.



IN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT

We have considered the challenges of moral formation and some of the history of moral formation in this country in a wide context. A more specific focus may be helpful for Catholic educators, those in catechetical ministry, and Catholic parents. Are there specific elements that need to be identified in a Catholic context? I believe there are.

Catholics have borrowed from our surrounding culture with its turn to the individual and the psychological experience of the children entrusted to our care. We have striven to be sensitive to them. At the same time, we have proposed the moral principles and prescriptions that belong to our Catholic faith tradition. With the renewal of teaching materials that followed the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, 1997), we may be doing a better job of communicating Catholic moral teaching than we did just a few years ago. Still, it seems to me that there are troubling indications that many of our Catholic young people are morally adrift.

Talk to priests who prepare couples for the celebration of their marriage, and they will tell you how pervasive—to the point of being unremarkable—is

cohabitation before marriage. Then there is the truly troubling statistic that thirty percent of the women who obtain abortions self-identify as Catholics. And we are not even thirty percent of the general population. In other areas that carry significant moral weight ranging from capital punishment to our obligations to the poor, many Catholics and perhaps especially young Catholics are indistinguishable from others in the culture. For these reasons, I say that there are troubling indications that our young people are morally adrift.

Now within today's church—and this has always been the case—there are people who have quick and sure answers to these challenges. There is a liberal-progressive wing that exhorts us to be realistic and to re-write Catholic morality to make it more in tune with the times. But we cannot discard our tradition. Even if we could, the work represented by Christian Smith and James Davison Hunter tells us that a “with it” morality does not work. There is also a traditionalist wing that wants a pure and simple return to the Baltimore Catechism coupled with exercises to pound in the commandments and to force-feed the principles of morality. This approach does not work either. We had it for a long time. If it worked so

well, how did it unravel so quickly and completely? Does anything, especially in the moral realm, that is not personally appropriated ever work? I think not.

So, those of us—Catholic educators, catechists, and parents—who are deeply committed to our young people, face very serious difficulties in trying to serve and form our young people as faithful followers of Jesus Christ who live good lives. At this point, permit me to note an additional challenge that we face.

Even if we were clear and effective in our moral formation, we face formidable competitors. There are other elements of moral formation over which we have little or no control, and these elements shape character and train young people in various patterns of behavior. First of all, parents can compete with us for moral formation. Yes, parents may or may not be appropriate models in the course of moral formation. I am thinking, for example, of the disturbing statistic that pastors with schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago relate to me. By their best estimate, only twenty-five percent of the parents and children associated with the parish school come to Sunday Mass consistently.

Another pervasive element of moral formation is advertising. Children

I think the grand question that we face as moral educators and formators of the young is this: what is compelling and effective in moral formation and transformation?

and young people, indeed, all of us, are continually exposed to advertising that tries to shape our values, to order our priorities, and to influence us to make certain choices. That is moral formation, although it is often not positive and not good moral formation. Advertising, however, is pervasive and often quite effective.

In another direction, the exposure of young people to various media also has a powerful formative effect. I did some preliminary research and made some startling discoveries. In the course of an ordinary day, ordinary young persons will spend three hours and twenty minutes watching TV. They will spend one hour and fifteen minutes on the computer and internet. They will send or receive ninety-six text messages. All this amounts to stiff competition in the realm of trying to communicate and reinforce moral formation in the Catholic tradition.

THE BIG QUESTION: HOW DO WE GET THROUGH?

After identifying all these challenges both in the general culture and as they come to roost in our Catholic context, we may feel disheartened. We may feel that we face an impossible task. The question readily surfaces: how can we—who are responsible in a particular way for the moral formation of our children and young people—get through? How can we make any headway?

Historically, as I noted earlier, we tried to get through by communicating rules and principles. Rules identify what to do and what not to do. Principles identify why we do or do not do something. Both rules and principles are important. They are, both in our Catholic tradition and even in the larger expanse of human experience, indispensable reference points. They do not serve us well, however, as a starting point. Rules without a deeper foundation feel imposed, as not belonging to me, as no fun. Besides, there is always some clever way to get around rules that are just rules. Principles, again without a deeper foundation, come across as abstract and as difficult to figure out. It seems to take too much effort to use principles and then make proper applications.

We are approaching our conclud-

ing question. Just now, I initially framed it in this way: how can we get through? Certainly, that question reflects our own urgent sense of trying to do the right thing by our children and young people. And, in some measure, it is a question born out of desperation. Let me reframe it in a more positive and constructive direction, and then I will try to offer an answer. I think the grand question that we face as moral educators and formators of the young is this: what is compelling and effective in moral formation and transformation? If we can find that compelling and effective point, we will not have all the necessary dimensions or a fully completed program of moral formation. Rather, we will have an absolutely indispensable component, the foundation and the basis on which to build that formation.

WHAT IS COMPELLING AND EFFECTIVE IN MORAL FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION?

As I pondered this question, I was drawn to the Scriptures. For me, the Word of God provides a key that unlocks this complicated and daunting task of the moral formation of young people. There are two elements found in the Word of God that make for compelling and effective moral formation and transformation. They are narrative and connection. Another way of saying this is to speak of story and relationship. Let me explain.

The story is not just any story. Nor does it amount to moralizing parables that may or may not inspire. The fundamental story is the story of God's involvement with humanity. And this means that there is a joint narrative of God and his creation. What emerges from this intertwined story of God and humanity is our connection or relationship with God, most particularly for us in the Christian tradition, our relationship in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Narrative and connection or story and relationship—these are the compelling and effective foundations of moral formation and transformation. Let me be more specific.

Consider this verse from the Book of Exodus 20:2: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

you shall have no other gods before me.” Then follow the other nine commandments. Stay with this verse and dwell on it. It is brief and compact, but it is also essential for the entire moral vision embodied in the commandments.

This verse speaks of a story of grace and liberation. God takes initiative and frees his people from the slavery of Egypt. The narrative of this exodus or liberation belongs both to God and to the people of Israel. It is an intertwined narrative. Out of that narrative is born an entirely unique connection or relationship between God and his people. “I am the Lord *your* God.” Elsewhere, of course, we hear in the Scriptures: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” The shared narrative or story has linked God and his people in an utterly intimate and enduring relationship. In light of that story and that relationship, the commandments make sense. They are not just rules. They are living expressions born out of the shared narrative with God and Israel’s abiding relationship with God who makes the claim “I am the Lord *your* God.” This is the compelling and effective foundation of moral formation: story and relationship. And even if in the history of Israel the people would sin and be unfaithful—as they did and as they were—the prophets were always there to call them back to the fundamental narrative and the great connection that they had and needed to renew with God.

Consider another place in Scripture that comes to the same conclusion. This time, we move to the New Testament and the writings of Saint Paul. The verse is Galatians 2:20. Paul writes: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Again, notice the elements of story and relationship. Paul identifies the core story of Jesus, the Son of God. Out of love he gave up his life on the cross for us. And Paul is especially aware that this is not a generic love that leads to Jesus’ death: “who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.” The story of the death of the Lord is intertwined with the very heart of Paul’s life. And because Jesus and Paul are inextricably

linked by the narrative of the death of Jesus, there emerges from that linked story a relationship of unsurpassed intimacy: “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” That decisive story ~~which~~ became the decisive relationship of Paul’s life now becomes the moral measure of his life, how he conducts himself and how he lives: “and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.” Again, in a way that parallels the passage from Exodus, we rediscover in the story of Jesus’ death and in our relationship with him the very foundation of our moral lives.

We have just touched on the compelling and effective foundation of moral formation and transformation, and we have found that foundation in story and relationship, narrative and connection. Obviously, that foundation needs further development and deeper exploration. For now, I think that it is sufficient for us as a beginning. We face so many challenges in communicating and fostering moral formation for our young people. And here, in narrative and connection, in story and relationship, we have a beginning of a pattern and a source of hope for our efforts. Here is a vision that moves beyond psychology and feelings and beyond individual and relativistic sensibilities. Here in the narrative or story of God’s love manifested for us and made real in our encounter with the living Christ who died for us, we find ourselves in a life-changing, life-shaping and morally constitutive relationship with him.

When we know ourselves as immersed in the holy narrative of our salvation and when we sense ourselves joined in the connection of God with us and God for us in Jesus Christ, then we can bring our children to the same story and relationship. We will have accomplished the most foundational and the most significant task of moral formation. Once our young people know the story of God in Jesus Christ intertwined with the narrative of their lives and once they know the reality of their relationship with God in Jesus Christ, the rest will follow. They will learn how to live, because they have come to know and to be in relationship with the one who is the way, the life and the truth. And we, who so often feel challenged and even under siege as we try to foster the moral

formation of young people, will come to know hope and confidence in fulfilling the great responsibility entrusted to us.



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“He Descended Into

A state prison in California, “the big house,” at least any of the half-dozen I know, has a series of yards running from “A” to “D” for different sorts of offenders. Each prison will hold several thousand. Our justice system, like a huge commercial trawler, picks up not only the big fish, but a lot of smaller ones that could better be thrown back, to say nothing of the dolphins, those whose innocence gets no real defense.

This toxic environment, full of gangs watching out for their own and individuals watching their backs, this nursery of spite abetted often by guards, is food for dark thoughts. Here is a big slice of what Jesus and Paul and John called “the world,” the environment resistant to God. Could it be, in fact, a microcosm of the human family, where infections of the spirit easily spread?

Saint Augustine is credited with diagnosing and naming original sin. He certainly knew human weakness, starting with his own, and the bents of selfishness. He found the Roman Empire, his native element, to be riddled with pride, lust and violence, which he catalogued and lamented in *The City of God*. His verdict is so scathing it makes you wonder how Augustine, reflecting on history, could even talk of a city of God. He would surely find a prison an unlikely place to look for it. Or would he?

A prison chaplain whom I have assisted, a deacon, speaks of the prison as a big parish. He offers fifteen communion services a week in the interfaith chapel, or in available nooks, and often in “the Shoe” (Segregated Housing Unit, SHU), where inmates attend within individual cages. In the two prisons where I assist more often, I am struck by the piety of both women and men who come to services. There is plenty evidence of conversion. When they come to confession, I know I can give them as penance some reading from the gospels, or the recitation of a psalm. I can assign a rosary but they are often already saying one every day. A distinct aura of innocence can be noted in some inmates, whatever may have been their check-

ered history. So even here in the state prison, an ambience so unfriendly to goodness, so largely cold to religion, the city of God has at least a toehold. Our Lord is unmistakably present.

The prison experience has led me to a novel interpretation of those words from the Apostles Creed, “He descended into hell.” At its origin the phrase refers to Christ bringing salvation to all those born before his time and who could be considered among the just. They have been awaiting him in the darkness of the Otherworld. To me the phrase speaks today of Christ coming to share the often infernal suffering of so many brothers and sisters of ours, whatever prison they have made for themselves or been plunged into. It means the grace of Christ entering the sinful environment where we live and insisting that we not be of it.

Saint Ignatius, in the first meditation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, asks me to envision myself as “imprisoned in this corruptible body and my whole compound self as an exile in this valley among brute animals.” This pessimistic image situating me in “the valley of tears” used to dishearten me greatly. I felt it offensive to the truth that we are in God’s image. And doesn’t God, at the start of the bible, looking on the first human creatures, pronounce them good? But I have by now listened to enough world news, heard enough confessions and found out enough about myself to accept this starting point of Ignatius, his first step on the way to conversion. How easily we exile ourselves from goodness!

The Easter truth is that God never leaves anyone alone in hell. God has plenty of angels, mostly of the human sort, to go in his name to others. The Messiah Jesus Christ is always impelling his envoys, “not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street” (Isaiah 42:2)—not berating or clamoring but encouraging, showing respect, pointing the right way. “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench” (Isaiah 42:3).

Hell"

James Torrens, S.J.

One such emissary I have worked with is Mary Clark, known by her religious name as Madre Antonia and referred to as "the Prison Angel" for her forty years of volunteer service at the state penitentiary in Tijuana, Baja California. She has attended to inmates and guards in a gamut of ways from obtaining medicine, going to court with them, grieving at deaths, urging confession, testifying to her faith.

Such old-fashioned zeal is what Ignatius Loyola wanted to evoke in his meditation on the call of the eternal king, known simply now as "the Kingdom." Many of us credit this meditation with the earliest stirring of desires to be like Christ and with Christ, however we are impelled, so that he can descend among the hungers and multiplex distress of those still captive in this darkling world.



Father James Torrens, S.J., lives in Fresno, California, at the pastoral center of the diocese, and serves in ministry to the diocese.

THE BIG HOUSE

ring around the Big House,
razor wire encampment,
the warren we've made ourselves
its niches hotly disputed

when Jesus descended into hell
was it not here

into Yard A, its angers running riot
and Yard B for bullies
plus the connivers corralled in C

if anyone wants out, he cries
renounce yourself
identity change whole bore

Yard D for the depressives
who have done no-one wrong
but were sucked in

o our dear Orpheus
take them by the hand

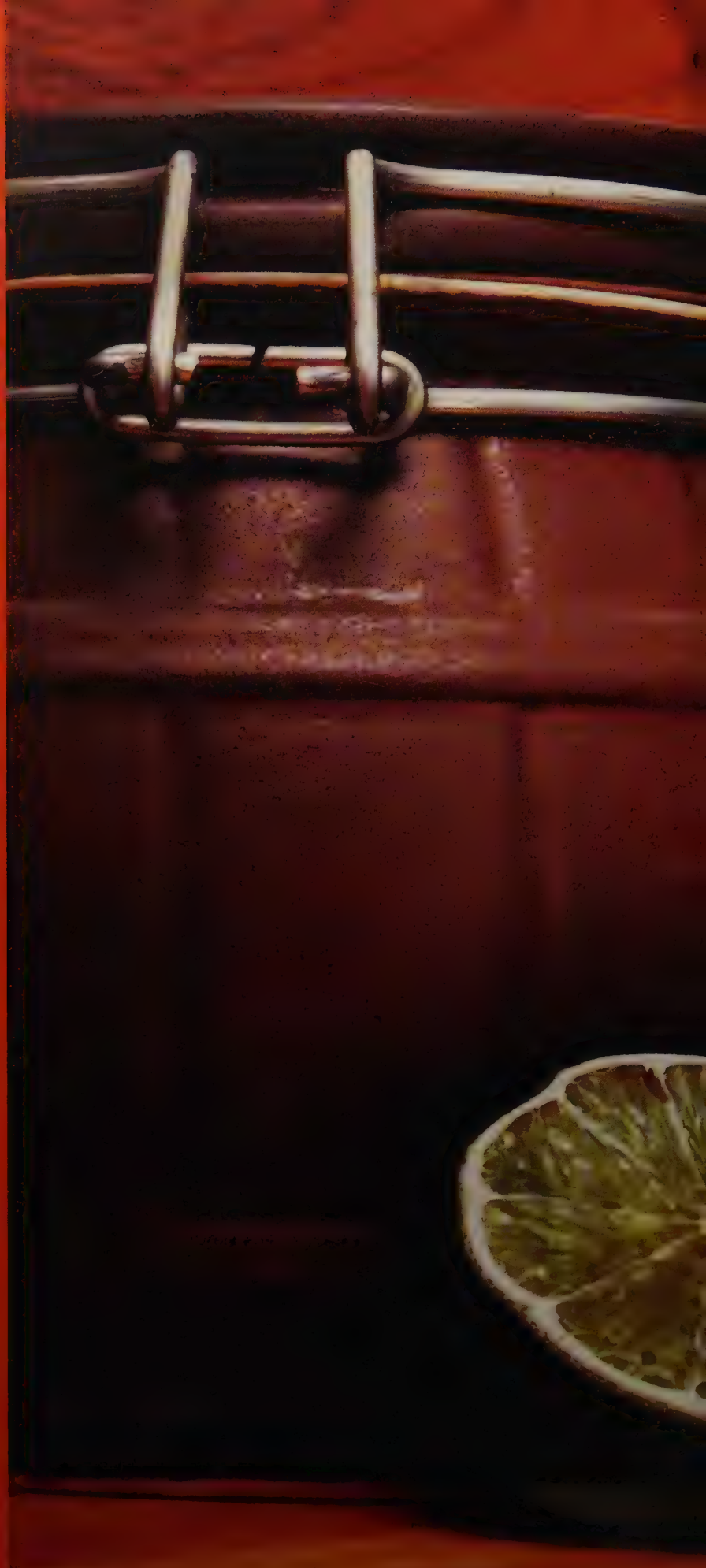
and as for enviers
fools for the flesh
guzzlers and hoarders

the One who's descended urges
come out with me, come out

Another Day at the Parish Food Pantry

George Wilson, S.J.

Wednesday afternoon, 12:30. It's time to set up for the weekly food distribution. All week long our leaders have been making trips to the city food bank to stock our shelves. When you're trying to give the equivalent of five meals per person (for the whole month) to an average of 70 families, it adds up: a lot of donations, a lot of sheer physical work. Even though our clients can only come once a month—how do they manage for the other 25 days?—the team of 20 volunteers is on deck every week for three hours. We have volunteers from The Church of Christ helping along side members of our own Church of the Resurrection; at one point we enjoyed the blessing of a Mormon bishop and his family helping to pack bags.





*These are our
sisters and
brothers and it
is our privilege to
be able to be the
face and hands of
Jesus in serving
them.*

I put on my nametag. First-name tags are vital: we want our clients to relate to us by our given names, as we do with them. Before they arrive, I'd like you to take a walk through the process with me.

It begins with all our volunteers joining hands in prayer for the day's clients. We are a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul and his vision is clear and strong: these are our sisters and brothers and it is our privilege to be able to be the face and hands of Jesus in serving them. It's a message our volunteers take very seriously.

When our clients arrive they will wait in line with carrying devices of every kind: roller bags, strollers, shopping carts, you name it. On entering the building each person will receive a number. The purpose is not bureaucratic, but simple fairness: serving according to each person's time of arrival is highly valued!

My job will be straight-forward: to call each number when one of our team of four registrars is ready to sign in the next enrollee. If I get confused and overlook the person with the next number, don't worry: the clients will straighten me out real fast, usually accompanied by great laughter on all sides.

Our faithful registrars are now setting up: four African-American women, veterans of skilled professional positions in school and hospital administration. Try to thank them for their service and their spontaneous response is always,

"We are so happy to be here and serve these people!" As I stand in the doorway waiting to call the next number I marvel at the warmth and patience with which they welcome our sisters and brothers, some of whom are mentally confused and can require especially tactful interaction.

When they come you might notice how tightly each client clutches the envelope that confirms their place of residence or payment of a recent electric bill. It brings a sobering realization that this is perhaps their only lifeline to access the societal services so vital to their survival. What middle-class person ever has to be sure they have their electric bill with them when they go to the supermarket? The threat of losing your personal identity and becoming a non-person in a vast bureaucratic world must be terrifying.

After registration, there will be another wait, until our next shopping assistant is free to take the client downstairs, where they will make their food choices. How much they can select depends on the number of their dependents; the food choices themselves are based on food-groups that nudge them gently toward healthier eating.

As a shopping assistant (all are women) accompanies a client down to shop, she will engage her partner in neighborly conversation. "How did your daughter make out at her job interview, Janet?" "What happened when



you went to the clinic?" "Hey, Freddy, I had you last month! I just won the lottery!" "Did you stop by our nurse to get your blood-pressure checked?"

After shopping it's either out to the car, helped by one of our high-schoolers, or perhaps a walk of several blocks home with their groceries. The shopping assistant heads back upstairs to accompany her next client; meanwhile the guys on the downstairs "grunt crew" shuffle back and forth, re-stocking. Boxes have to be pulled open, bubble-wrap cut through, canned goods loaded onto depleted shelves. All that while shopping continues; it can get pretty crowded in that small basement.

So who are these folk, our patrons? What are they like? And perhaps more importantly, how do they match the stereotypical image people so easily project onto them?

Quick: when I say "food recipients," what image flashes on your mental screen? What do they look like? And how do they behave?

In our case, since the neighborhood is predominantly African-American so is our clientele. Did you imagine mostly women? Right, but there are still lots of men. Elderly? If so, you were right. We have a lot of young single mothers—and grandmothers—taking care of children.

More importantly, what was the tone accompanying your imagination? Did you see all the clients humble and grateful for the kindness of us good

church folk? Did you notice that stately old woman holding herself with pride in her bearing—someone who never expected it might come to this? Did you find yourself wondering how that young woman over there could let herself get so fat, eating all that junk food and then expecting society to take care of her? Did you perhaps wonder how many in the room might be gaming the system by using a phony ID? You probably didn't overhear the woman who told me that this was her first time but that she wouldn't be back; when I asked why, she said, "I just realized, I don't need food as much as these people do; I can get along. . . ." Maybe you quite unintentionally envisaged Ronald Reagan's famous "welfare queen": "She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000."

If you answered all the above—except for the welfare queen—you were close. As a white cleric I had to move beyond my imagination and get up close and personal to experience the rich mix. Nobility and grace; ugly sense of entitlement; heart-felt gratitude at "not being treated like number, as we are in so many places;" cheating and taking food from others; bubbly joy and

You probably didn't overhear the woman who told me that this was her first time but that she wouldn't be back; when I asked why, she said, "I just realized, I don't need food as much as these people do; I can get along. . . ."





scarcely concealed bitterness. Pretty much like the rich, when you come to think of it.

To romanticize the poor is just as misguided as it is to bureaucratize them. Most of us are quite aware of the latter risk; we've all read enough heart-rending op-ed pieces to be sensitized to that. Although valid data may be necessary for purposes of reasoned social policy, our national quantification itch bleaches out rich human experience and turns human beings into faceless statistics: percentages and ratios, lines on a graph.

Less recognized, however, is a tendency that frequently arises as a reaction against the tyranny of numbers. It's a frequent trap of young gung-ho social justice types. Sentimentalizing the poor is equally depersonalizing. To imagine all poor people as saints—much less, *to expect them to be so and then blame them if they are not*—is first of all an avoidance of reality. It lays on the poor expectations we place on no one else. And ultimately, it diminishes our sense of the infinite creativity of our God.

The answer to faceless anonymity is not sugary smiley-faces, it is the challenging task of kneeling before the reality—the dignity—of each utterly incomparable face. Each one bears its own, deeply etched glaciers and crags

and rivulets, the residue of poor choices made and wounds unjustly inflicted. Each is a chapter in a story that is ultimately inaccessible even to its owner, much less to the motley horde of tourists passing by.

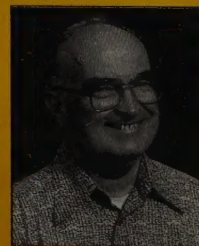
I am reminded of the wise counsel of Monsignor Bob Fox, the apostle to Spanish Harlem in the 1960s. On the weekends Bob would invite Christian Family Movement couples and their families from suburban parishes to join residents in cleaning the litter from the 'hood, ending the day with a picnic on tables in the street. As he prepared the volunteers for the experience he would say,

Don't be surprised if you see a woman turning tricks on the corner. If that happens, what do you think? The person who is only a spectator might say, "Wow! I just saw a real prostitute!" The pious church-going Christian might feel he "got it" by saying, "There but for the grace of God go I." The better response is, "There go I." I may not sell my body on the street—but I prostitute my principles by cutting corners on the Gospel every day. I may not scam society by taking government handouts—but I fail

every day to use my God-given talents and resources to create a better world.

We don't serve the poor because they are virtuous or out of sympathy for their lot. We serve them because *they are ourselves*. Flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. It's been said that the poor will save us, but only if we allow them to reveal to us our own impoverishments. If we don't identify with them, if they remain "somebody else," we're still lost.

In order to tell the story of our pantry a photographer friend volunteered to take shots of it in operation. The photos were made into a slide show for showing to suburban parishes, to solicit their help. I am still dealing with the comment of a nephew of mine after he viewed the show: "The toughest part for me was the last slide; the woman was pushing her cart out to the car, and the caption read, 'Till next month.'"



Father George Wilson, S.J., is a retired church organizational consultant and a member of The Church of the Resurrection in Cincinnati.

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